STREET & SMITH'S

UNKNOWN

FANTASY FICTION

JUNE 1940 20c

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"I'M FROM MISSOURI—
and Listerine certainly showed me!"

says Mrs. Madge Purdy Van Cott

When I became a nurse I first heard of the peculiar bottle-shaped bacillus, Pityrosporum Ovale—nearly always found in high concentration in infectious dandruff conditions—and how important it is to keep this and other organisms under control. Time and again I prescribed Listerine Antiseptic and massage . . . time and again I saw dandruff's scales disappear.

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So, if you've been fighting a losing battle against dandruff, don't neglect what may be a real infection. Start right now with Listerine Antiseptic and massage. It's the treatment which has proved so useful against infectious dandruff in a substantial majority of clinical test cases.

LAMBERT PHARMACAL CO., *St. Louis, Mo.*

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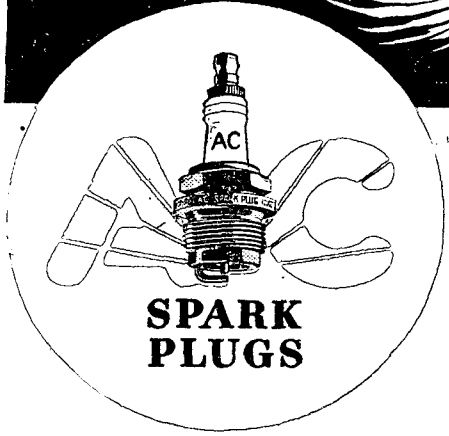

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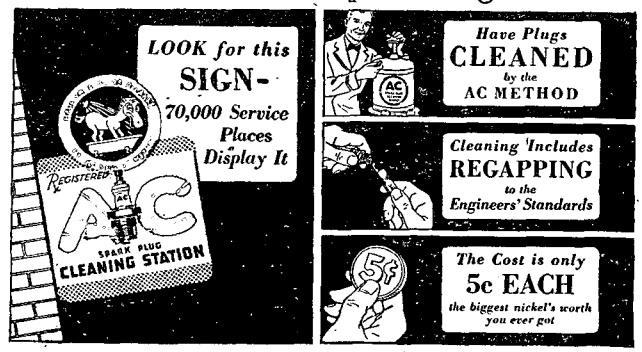
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COVER BY CARTIER

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All fictional characters mentioned in this magazine are fictitious. Any similarity in name or character to any real person is coincidental.

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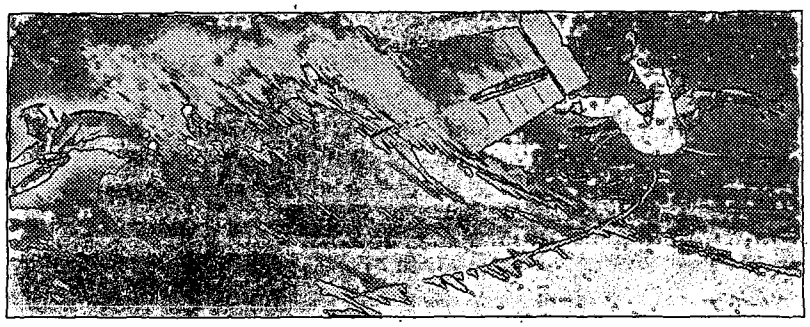
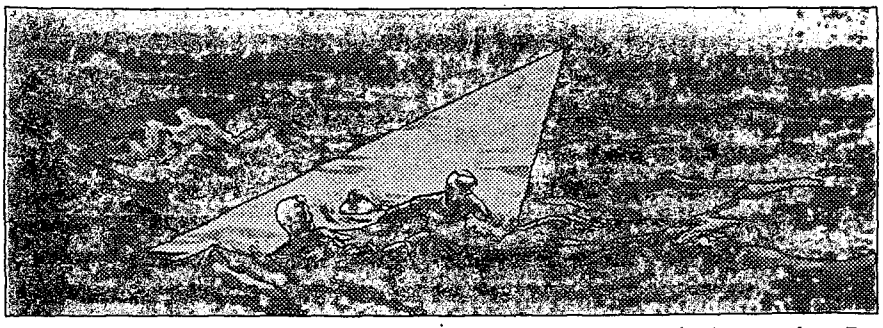
"THE HEAVY LINE DRAGGED ME TOWARD ETERNITY!"

A true experience of C. J. LATIMER, *Warren, Ohio*

"ANOTHER FISHERMAN and myself had just finished setting a heavy trot-line in Lake Erie," writes Mr. Latimer, "when a sudden treacherous squall lashed out of nowhere and churned the water into towering waves.

"A WAVE SMACKED us broadside, and over we went! Then I felt a heavy drag on my leg. I was caught in the trot-line and was being pulled to my doom. In the darkness, my companion couldn't untangle me!





"BUT ONE OF OUR PARTY ON shore brought his flashlight into action. Its powerful beam cut the distance and darkness—and in a minute I was free. I shudder to think of what might have happened except for those dependable 'Eveready' *fresh* DATED batteries!

(*Signed*) C J Latimer"

The word "Eveready" is a registered trade-mark of National Carbon Co., Inc.

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OF THINGS BEYOND

On page 8 of this issue you will find a picture of the July cover of Unknown. The accompanying text explains in part the reason for this change; a little further amplification is in order—plus some comments on L. Ron Hubbard's story.

Unknown simply is not an ordinary magazine. It does not, generally speaking, appeal to the usual audience of the standard-type magazine. We have decided on this experimental issue, because of this, in an effort to determine what other types of newsstand buyers might be attracted by a somewhat different approach.

To the nonreader of fantasy, to one who does not understand the attitude and philosophy of Unknown, the covers may appear simply monstrous rather than the semicaricatures they are. They are not, and have not been intended as illustrations, but as expressive of a general theme.

To those who know and enjoy Unknown, the cover, like any other wrapper, is comparatively unimportant. For the others—we're trying an experiment. Your comments—cracks or otherwise—appreciated. This issue being crowded, "—And Having Writ—" has been squeezed out. An extra-large session is promised for reactions on the coming July cover. The present warning is to make sure none of you miss Hubbard's story because you fail to recognize Unknown's new dress.

For Hubbard's yarn is not one to miss. "Fear" has been built of nightmare stuff. It is meant to chill the reader on any hot summer night. Remembering Hubbard's success in that ungentle art working with the mild material of "Death's Deputy," be warned; "Fear" will set cold lizard feet acrawl on your spine and make voices gibber in your ears! For Hubbard has, in his first line, pointed out that such things as he tells may happen to any man. *And he's quite right!*

THE EDITOR.

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Read How These Men Got Better Jobs
THEN FIND OUT WHAT RADIO OFFERS YOU Mail Coupon

THESE MEN DID NOT GO TO COLLEGE

Read about the jobs they got and the money they make

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Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, technicians. Radio manufacturers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, servicemen in good-pay jobs. Radio jobbers, dealers, employ installation and service men. Many Radio Technicians open their own Radio sales and repair businesses and make $30, $40, $50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make $5 to $10 a week fixing Radios in spare time. Automobile, police, aviation, Commercial Radio; loud-speaker systems, electronic devices are other fields offering opportunities for which N.R.I. gives the required knowledge of Radio. Television promises to open good jobs soon.

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The day you enroll, I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets which start showing you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your course I send plans and directions which have helped many make $200 to $500 a year in spare time while learning. I send special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits. This 50-50 training method makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL, ALL-WAVE, ALL-PURPOSE SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT to help you make money fixing Radios while learning and equip you for full time work after you graduate.

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DISTURBING YET FASCINATING

Those three words seem to sum up the editorial policy of UNKNOWN—a story must, of course, be fascinating to many readers, but an UNKNOWN story must also be disturbing.

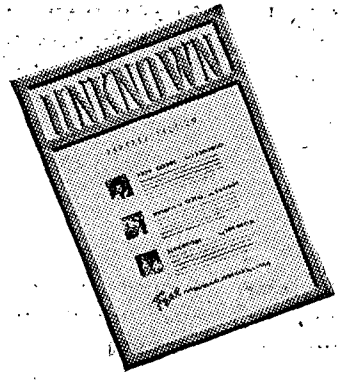
Now comes the disturbing (yet fascinating) part of the magazine itself. People by the hundreds write in to tell us that UNKNOWN is not just another specialized-fiction magazine. That it's unique. It expresses a new note in modern literature.

So we're experimenting. We've made the July cover look very dignified. We're going to ask your newsdealer to display it with magazines of general class—not with the newsprints.

And we're asking you—do you like the more dignified cover? Isn't it more fitting for a magazine containing such stories?

We'd like to hear from you.

The Editor



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But without horns

The tale of one against the world—but NOT one man! He was unhuman—superhuman! And more than a match for man!

by NORVELL W. PAGE

His eyes still on the shouting headlines of the morning newspaper, Walter Kildering drew out a notebook from an inner pocket and flipped the pages rapidly. Those pages were covered with close writing in an even,

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precise hand. The script was of curious curlicues appended to a horizontal line. There was a knife crease between Kildering's gray eyes as he added two lines of the characters. Afterward, he walked rapidly through the peaceful spring sunlight of Washington; slanted across the street toward the quiet building which housed the Federal Bureau of Investigation headquarters.

It was when he started up the steps that he saw the doors were barricaded with steel armor plate—and guarded by machine guns!

Walter Kildering neither paused nor called out at this discovery. There was no alteration at all in his expressionless face, except that fear crept darkly into his gray eyes. But it was not fear of his own life, for he moved up the steps with the fixed deliberation of an escalator.

Kildering's eyes swept the steel barrier once, and he walked steadily to the panel at the extreme right—the only panel that could be removed readily. Even then, he said nothing, but he masked the fear in his eyes with lowered lids.

Inside, a voice spoke cautiously. "Just a minute, Kildering. Orders are not to let anybody in."

Low-voiced shouts ran along the corridor inside. The echoes came dimly through the steel and Kildering waited outside in the quiet warmth of the spring sunshine—and felt coldness crawl up his spine with the slow cruelty of a dull knife. The newspapers this morning had screamed of two F. B. I. men being murdered in the maternity ward of a hospital in the Middlewestern city of Metropolis; now he found the doors of headquarters barricaded. It all fitted into the pattern of Kildering's deductions—and the conclusion was a hideous thing!

A SMALL BREEZE wandered through the street, stirring the fresh green of the newborn leaves on sidewalk trees; bringing the scent of rain-wet grass and fertile earth in the parks. Kildering's hand knotted slowly into a white-knuckled fist. He swallowed noisily.

In his brain, he whispered, "For God's sake, *hurry!*" His lips did not move.

When the steel panel was dragged aside to let Kildering enter, he seemed to step through almost casually, but he covered the distance to the elevators with long, efficient strides. The corridor was dim and cold. Pinched bars of sunlight, slanting through the interstices of the armor, seemed lost and vague. Men's whispers made chill echoes—Kildering's feet were silent.

"Third," he said flatly to the elevator operator.

The man had an automatic in his fist. He shook his head as he sent the cage surging upward.

"Can't stop there, Mr. Kildering," he said. "Orders!"

Kildering's eyes closed and he fought the shiver that snaked across his shoulders. His voice was quiet. "Who's on guard there?" he asked. "On the third floor."

"Mayor and Summers, sir."

Kildering's eyes narrowed. They would be hard men to pass—but he had to pass them! When the elevator door had closed behind him, on the second floor, he sprinted toward the general offices. His feet made no sound. He whipped into the offices, crossed with long bounds toward the closed door of Superintendent Overholt's private quarters. A desk interposed, and he hurdled cleanly over it, but so perfect was his bodily co-ordination that he checked cleanly before the door.

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"Kildering, sir!" he called. "It's damned important!"

Overholt growled permission and Kildering snapped open the door, reached the superintendent's desk in a long stride. His voice was suppressed, driving. "I have some deductions to lay before you. They take into account the fact that the building is in a stage of siege—and that the chief believes he is threatened with assassination!"

Overholt was suddenly on his feet, a tall, bushy-haired man with stooped, powerful shoulders. "Who told you about that threat?" he demanded. "No one knows of that. No one except Chief Erricson and me!"

Kildering turned toward the door. "I'll explain on the way to the chief's office," he said. "We have to act quickly to save his life! He is in danger all right—but not from visible assassins!"

"Wait!" Overholt jammed his big fists down on his hips. His blue eyes glittered beneath the overhang of bushy brows, and his voice was metallic, brittle. "What do you mean, invisible assassins?"

Kildering forced himself to speak steadily. "Believe me, sir," he said, "there is no time to lose. I was worried this morning when I saw the news of those two murders in Metropolis. When I found the doors barricaded, I knew my suspicions were right! There is not a minute to spare!"

A HEAVY FROWN pulled Overholt's bushy brows down over his eyes. Kildering was the best brain in the service, and a leader in every fiber. Even Overholt, long in command, could feel the pull of Kildering's unconscious accent of command. He set himself solidly.

"Kildering, I can't take you to the chief," he said. "Until he passes the word, not even the president of the United States would be permitted to approach his office!"

"Then we must force his door!"

Overholt came around his desk. "If it were anyone else than you, Kildering," he snapped, "I'd put you under arrest for a madman! What are you talking about?"

Kildering felt a surge of impatience. He could see the truth so clearly himself. And the chief's life was at stake! His words came out like earnest bullets.

"The fact those men of ours were killed in Metropolis means that the chief has attacked the most dangerous criminal ever known," Kildering said crisply. "The same man who robbed six banks in the State of Wichinois of almost three million dollars. You remember what happened to those bankers whom we questioned about the crimes?"

Overholt nodded his big head. "Certainly. Three of them died, of heart failure—"

"That's what they called the murder of our men," Kildering threw in softly.

Overholt frowned and went on: "Three other bankers lost their minds, very fortunately for the bank robber!"

"It wasn't good fortune," Kildering said. "What happened to Police Chief Eidson, of Metropolis, just after he notified us he thought he had a clue to the identity of the robber?"

Overholt jerked a hand impatiently. "Apparently Eidson was already out of his head. Before we could get there, he barricaded himself in his office and killed himself! Crazy as a bat!"

Kildering cried softly: "Don't you see, sir? Every man who attacks this criminal either dies of

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heart failure or goes crazy! Now, the F. B. I. has attacked him. And the chief has barricaded himself in his office—*as Eidson did just before he killed himself!*"

Overholt jerked out a ragged oath. "You mean this criminal, the one we call the Unknown—"

"I mean, sir"—Kildering's voice was cold with urgency—"that he destroys whoever opposes him, either by death or by insanity! *We must reach the chief at once!*"

For an instant, Overholt's eyes strained wide with the shock of the words. He began an oath that didn't quite come out. Then he shook his head. He smiled, even chuckled a little.

"I can't argue with your logic, Kildering," he said. "As usual, it is faultless. But there's one thing you can't get past. No man can drive another man insane at will—and certainly he can't do it unless he can get through our guard to reach the chief! It just isn't possible. What have you been doing, Kildering, reading ghost stories?"

Kildering took a slow step toward Overholt. His chiseled face was grimly set. His gray eyes held twin fires of desperation. "The bankers were close prisoners when they went mad," he said. "Chief Eidson was alone from the time he phoned us until he was found dead."

Overholt waved a hand, still smiling. "There is some reasonable explanation for it. The chief is safe. When he sends for us—"

"He never will. He'll be dead."

Overholt shrugged. "Calm yourself, Kildering. After all, we're hunting an ordinary criminal, in this Unknown. He's smart, but he isn't a demon, with horns and a forked tail. Just a human being."

Kildering drew in a slow breath. His posture seemed to relax, and he lifted a hand to his forehead. "Then you won't take me to the chief?" he asked dully.

"We'll have to wait!" Overholt insisted irritably.

KILDERING stood there, with his hand pressed against his forehead. He was a despairing figure, with a weary droop to his proudly carried shoulders, but his mind was racing furiously. He could not blame Overholt for his failure to understand, to believe what he himself knew to be fact. But he could not allow the fantastic element of the danger to stop him. If the chief died— Kildering's lips twitched. Without the chief, the F. B. I. would lose half its efficiency. It was the skill of the chief's leadership, but more than that, the intense loyalty he inspired in his men which made the F. B. I. the powerful organization it was. And Kildering, like all the other men, respected and loved his chief.

Kildering sighed, and his hand started to drop wearily from his forehead. When it reached the level of his coat lapel, it moved with a speed that blurred the vision—and then was suddenly very steady, very still. It was grinding the muzzle of a heavy automatic into Overholt's body.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Overholt," he said, and his voice had the quiet ring of tempered steel. "We must save the chief! Please walk ahead of me!"

Overholt's cheeks burned an angry red. "Put that gun up, you fool!" he ordered.

Kildering's thumb pressed down the safety catch. In the silence between the two men, the mechanical snap was as ominous as a rattlesnake's whir. "Please go ahead of me," Kildering said again. Each word was chipped from ice.

Overholt stared fixedly into Kil-

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dering's eyes through a long unbreathing moment. Overholt swallowed stiffly. He turned on legs as stiff as stilts and stumped out of his office, across the big anteroom and into the corridor toward the third-floor stairway.

Kildering kept pace with Overholt's angry stride. The gun bored into Overholt's spine, and his finger was steady on the trigger—and Kildering's face was sternly drawn. It showed nothing of the terror that rode his soul—not fear for the consequences of his act, nor even for the death that might well be waiting in the corridor above when he confronted the guards—but fear for the life of his chief!

They went up the steps swiftly—and the third floor was blocked by a sheet of steel armor. Through narrow gunports, two machine guns peered out with uncompromising black muzzles.

"Summers! Mayor!" Kildering's voice lifted quietly to the two men on guard. "Pull aside the shield! The chief's life is in danger!"

The voice that answered was jubilant despite a rasp of strain. "Old Frozen-face Kildering!" the man cried. "I'd like to, Kildering. Swear I would! Can't."

Kildering's lips pulled out, cold against his teeth. Useless to try to persuade Mayor. He had failed with Overholt, much more apt to go against the orders of his chief than was Mayor. Kildering stepped slowly out from behind Overholt, his gun rock-steady against his hip.

"Overholt," he said softly, "tell them this is necessary."

MAYOR'S voice came to Kildering's ears thinly: "I can't help what the superintendent says. Chief told me to admit no one except by his specific orders! Go back down the steps, or I'll have to open fire. Those are my orders!"

Kildering drew in a slow breath. His eyes were sunken with pain. Mayor and Summers were his particular friends. He had worked with them a score of times. His friends.

"Mayor," Kildering said flatly, "your life and mine are less important than the chief's! If I have to shoot you, I will. And it will have to be a dead shot. I couldn't do anything else through that narrow port!"

Beside him, Overholt gasped, started to turn toward him. Kildering's voice rapped out, with the stern absolute tone of command:

"Summers! Hit Mayor over the head!"

Behind one of the gunports, the light reflection shifted a little. Mayor had turned his head to glance toward his partner! It was the moment for which Kildering had played. His leap was like the release of a tightly compressed spring.

In a single bound, Kildering reached the barrier and sprang high into the air. That first leap cleared the gunport. His hands clamped on top of the shield. The clash of his gun against the metal was harsh, ominous. Kildering's body swung upward, then horizontal—it popped out of sight over the top of the shield. It was as effortless as a bearing turning in a bath of oil!

Mayor and Summers were just beneath him as Kildering dropped. His straining eyes caught the blurred flicker of light as Mayor snatched for his underarm gun! Kildering whipped his feet down, and drove his heels hard into Mayor's shoulders. The blow paralyzed his friend's arms, hammered Mayor downward violently.

Falling, Kildering lashed out with

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his automatic. The blow was carefully calculated, and thanks to Kildering's superb co-ordination, it struck with exactly the right force. He caught the amazed stare on Summers' boyish face, the shocked bewilderment of the eyes just before the barrel slammed home. It was a flashing glimpse as he drove to the floor with Mayor. But even that was carefully calculated. Kildering's body was tumbling even as Mayor hit the floor. He balled, somersaulted to his feet and pivoted, all in one fluid motion. The gun lashed out again.

Kildering staggered against the wall, but he did not need to inspect the two men, his two friends. He knew they would stay down for a while. But pain fought with anxiety in his eyes as he raced on soundlessly toward the chief's door.

BEHIND HIM, he could hear Overholt swearing softly as he climbed, more laboriously, over the steel barrier. He hoped that Overholt would not try to interfere. Kildering drew in a slow breath. He pressed close to the door of the chief's office, and his voice came out easily.

"Chief!" he called. "Chief, it's Kildering! I can save you from John Miller!"

His voice echoed along the hall. Kildering, twisting his head about, listening with hard strain, saw Overholt drop to the floor. He did not check beside the unconscious men, but came toward Kildering, his arms swinging choppily. But he walked on his toes, softly, and Kildering drew in a slow breath of relief. Overholt might not be convinced, but that silent approach meant that, for the present, at least, Overholt would not attempt to interfere. He blotted the superintendent out of his mind, concentrated on hearing what went on inside the office. There had been no answer to his hail. Fear made the blood throb in his temples. Suppose the chief had already—

"You know me, chief!" Kildering called again, and his voice had a wheedling note. "It's Kildering! Old Frozen-face! I've cracked your toughest cases for you. I can crack this one, too." He checked, listening. His heart leaped wildly. He thought he had heard the creak of a floor board! "While I'm with you," he called, "John Miller can't hurt you. *I can save you from John Miller!*"

Overholt's brows were drawn down fiercely over his brilliant blue eyes. He stared gloweringly at Walter Kildering. Who was John Miller, Overholt wondered, and why was Kildering talking in that fool tone of voice, as if he would cajole a child? Abruptly, Overholt's eyes whipped toward the chief's door. The chief had answered!

Just on the other side of the barrier, the chief was whispering, as Kildering had whispered, hoarsely.

"*How?*" asked the chief. "*How can you save me from John Miller?*"

Overholt felt a small coldness tingle over his arms and shoulders, down his thighs. The chief's voice sounded—strange. He glanced at Kildering and almost swore aloud. Old Frozen-face was showing some expression for once. His face was twisted. And there was perspiration beading his forehead.

Kildering whispered, his mouth close to the door. "It's very simple, if you know the secret, chief. I can teach it to you, chief! It took me a long time to learn it, but you have a powerful mind. It will be easy for you! You are a great man. A strong

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man. You are greater than John Miller!"

Inside, the strange voice whispered back: "I . . . I am greater than John Miller?"

Overholt lifted a hand to his forehead, and the gesture was uncertain. Kildering was looking at him, torture in his eyes.

"Ready!" he formed soundless words with his lips. *"Go in fast!"*

"Certainly," Kildering said aloud, confidently. "You are much greater. You are the chief! Just let Kildering tell you the secret, old Frozen-face Kildering!"

The chief's voice came slowly: "I am greater than John Miller. I am the chief. I—"

The key clicked in the lock, the bolt rasped back. A gun muzzle peered out of the opening, a glittering eye.

"Not you, Overholt!" the chief's voice rasped. "Just Kildering. Good old Frozen-face. He knows the secret. But leave your gun outside, Kildering. How do I know you're not John Miller in disguise? By God, that's it! You're John Miller in disguise, and—"

The gun jerked into line!

AN INSTANT before the chief pulled the trigger, Kildering hit the door with his shoulder. He hit it with all the drive of his tensed thighs. The edge of the door caught the chief. It spun him across the room, slammed him against the wall. His arms flew wide with the impact—but he kept hold of the gun!

"You're not going to get me, John Miller!" he screamed. "You're *not* to—"

He pointed the automatic at Kildering and despite his frenzy, the muzzle was steady and unwavering. Overholt poised on the threshold, weighing his chances. His own gun was below in his desk—

The chief was whispering piercingly: "You're not going to get me, John Miller, and—" The chief's eyes were strained painfully wide. The whites showed entirely around the iris. He looked like a sleepwalker. The chief whimpered. "I forgot! I can't shoot John Miller! He's immortal—but I'll beat you, John Miller! I'll beat you!" He laughed, and the sound of it was cracked. *"I'll beat you!"*

He whipped up the automatic and ground the muzzle against his own temple! Overholt uttered a hoarse shout and leaped. He knew it would be too late.

The crash of the gun was deafening. The automatic flew from the chief's hand, thudded against the wall, bounced to the floor. The chief staggered sideways. There was a scratch across his temple, but no gaping hole.

Kildering's voice was the flick of a lash. "Knock him out, Overholt!"

Overholt's bound took him toward the chief. The chief screamed, tried to run. Overholt's fist lashed out with practiced efficiency. It was only when he had caught the chief and eased his unconscious body to the floor gently, that he looked toward Kildering.

Kildering was closing the door. He had his automatic in his fist, and there was a wisp of grease smoke at the muzzle. Kildering stood on widely braced legs. It was as if he had to stand that way, to hold himself erect.

Overholt understood then. He said heavily: "A nice shot, Kildering, knocking the gun out of the chief's hand." He straightened, and his broad shoulders shivered a little. "Good God, you were right! The chief . . . *insane!*"

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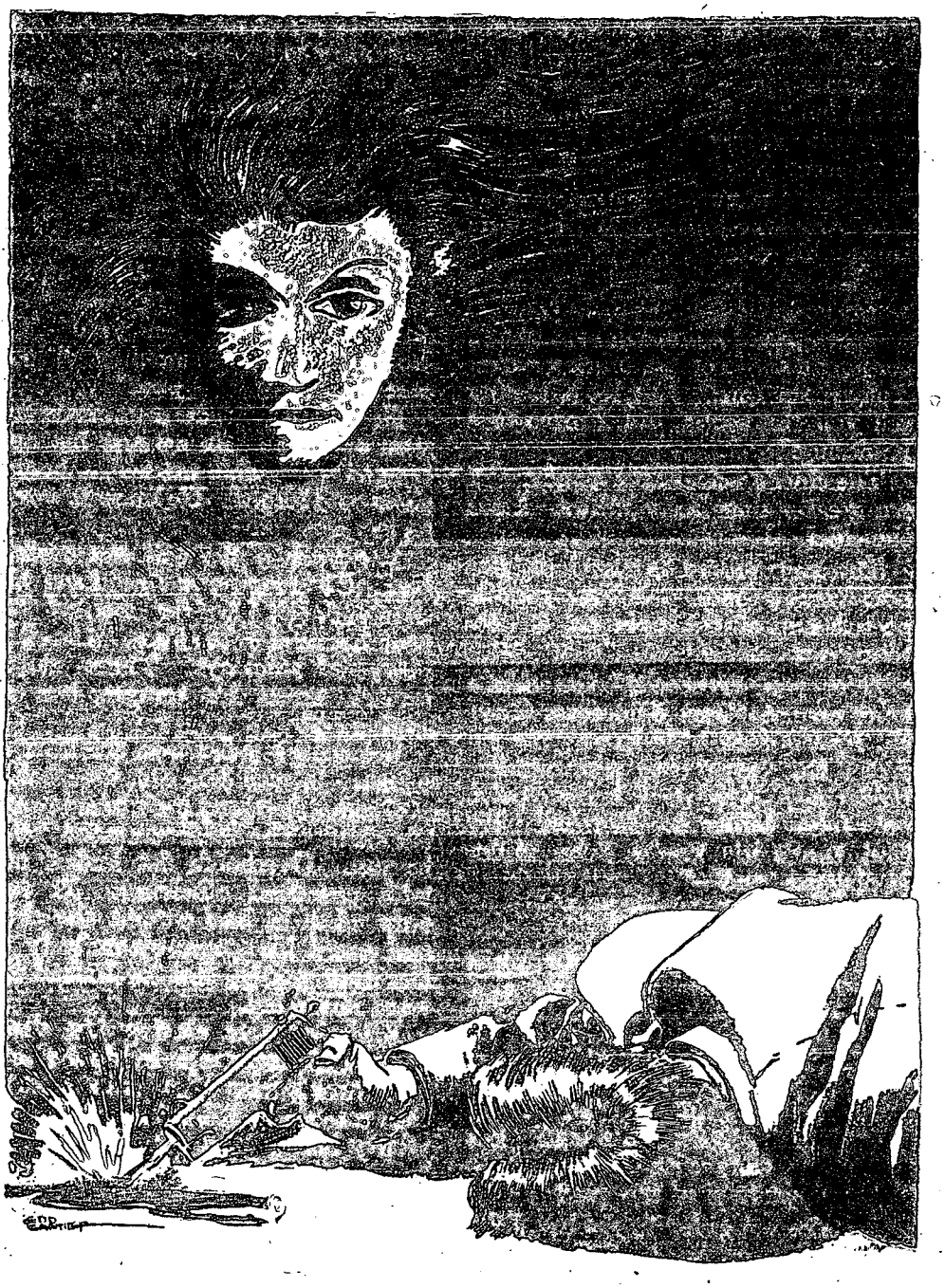

He could not know whether he had fired that last, utterly necessary shot as the face of the vision and morphia combined to beat him into blankness—

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II.

THE perspiration still glistened on Walter Kildering's forehead, but there was no other outward sign of perturbation. He felt a slight quivering in the taut cords behind his knees; there was no tremor in his hand as he holstered his automatic.

"That shot will bring men, Mr. Overholt," he said quietly. "They will find Mayor and Summers. We'll have to act quickly if we're to protect the chief's reputation."

Overholt swore, threw up his head in a listening attitude. There were shouts in the distance, and the swift racing beat of men's feet. He nodded. Imperceptibly, and without Overholt actually realizing it, the command had passed from Overholt. He was following Walter Kildering—as all men followed him in moments of stress.

"Right!" Overholt snapped. "Stay here, Kildering. You've got a lot of explaining to do."

Kildering nodded without words, and Overholt strode out, clapped the door shut behind him. Kildering turned toward his chief, walked slowly across to where he lay unconscious. Kildering went down on his knees and began to strap the chief's arms and legs together.

There was pity in Kildering's eyes, but there was anger there, too. It made hot, black flames in the depths of his gray eyes. It made his movements jerky, and the restraint turned his cheeks pale.

Up until the moment he had heard the chief's voice, Kildering had had only logic to guide him. Now he knew that everything he had feared, everything he had deduced in the pure abstraction of his intellect, was damnably true. There was a criminal with a record of incredibly successful thefts, and of equally cold-blooded murder, who could will a strong man like the chief into insanity! And he saw how the trick was being done—an unsolvable dilemma.

The actual phrasing of that thought jerked Kildering rigidly to his feet, sent coldness like a cruelly dull knife along his spine. His hands shook a little as he drew out his notebook and glanced with fierce, demanding eyes at the strangely spidery script which covered its pages. He was standing like that when Overholt returned.

Overholt checked just inside the door, staring at Kildering's stiffly erect back, the challenge of the upflung head, the easy competence of the shoulders. Overholt felt a brief stir of resentment. He realized then that he had resigned command to this other man, to Walter Kildering. And he recognized that Kildering was competent for the assignment.

Overholt's voice was quiet, and it held a new note of respect. "I've put Mayor and Summers under close arrest," he said curtly. "They won't be allowed to speak, even to their guards. How is the chief?"

Kildering turned slowly. "I think he'll be all right, sir," he said gravely. "I've strapped him up for his own safety. I've also given him a shot of morphine, but it's slow in taking hold. I owe you an explanation, Mr. Overholt."

"Not an explanation, no," Overholt said curtly. "It's quite obvious that you were right, and I am wrong. But, in God's name, Kildering, *tell me what it is we are fighting!*"

Kildering said quietly: "You are more generous than I had any right to expect. I'll be glad to tell you what I know, what I have guessed. It's pitifully little." He opened his notebook, and Overholt frowned at

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sight of the closely written pages.

"What the hell is that stuff?" he asked curtly. "It can't be code or shorthand."

Kildering shook his head, his face very grave. "No, sir. It's written in Old Icelandic, with Sanskirt characters. I think it would be harder than most codes to decipher, and it's much simpler to read and write."

"Simpler!" Overholt's blue eyes crinkled. It might have been mirth except for the hurt that drew his face gaunt whenever his glance rested on the unconscious chief. "Get on with it—only tell me in English!"

THE FACES of both men were grim. Kildering's was very pale as he stared at his notes. It had been deduction before, but he knew it now for truth. As long as John Miller remained only a matter of logic, he seemed remote—an abstraction of mathematics, clear enough on paper; insusceptible of material proof. But now he knew—

Kildering's voice bore that weight upon it as he spoke. His voice was like a muted string. "John Miller," he said quietly, "is, of course, the man whom we called the 'Unknown.' He is the man who killed those three bankers and two of our men, who killed Police Chief Eidson by making him commit suicide. He is the one who drove those three other bankers mad before they could give information against him. He has now driven the chief out of his mind by the same process. I have an idea how that is done."

Overholt stared at Kildering. He started to speak and didn't. He crossed slowly to the chief's desk, and dropped into the chair.

"The link of deaths, obviously murder, which are designated as heart failure by the physicians," Kildering resumed, more strongly, "and the induced insanity, join the same criminal who committed these crimes to another curious happening in the city of Metropolis. Three months ago, a woman was found dead in the woods near the city. She was dead of heart failure; and she carried a baby in her arms which the newspapers termed a 'monster.' The scientist who attempted to study this baby went insane and destroyed the monster. Our two men who were killed in Metropolis apparently went to question a woman in the maternity ward of the hospital. Apparently, these two men had hit on the same clue I am following. It was dangerous to John Miller—and he destroyed them."

Overholt's hands were knotted into fists. "I don't know what you're getting at," he said irritably, "but I don't like the sound of it."

"It's not—pleasant," Kildering agreed somberly. "These facts were all I had to go on at first. They hinted at something that I could not bring myself to believe—until those three kidnapings in Wichinois. Even then, the idea seemed so . . . so mad that I could not bring it to your attention until I had confirmation of some sort. I did not think the—conclusive evidence would be so horrible."

Overholt gestured with his fist. "You mean, I suppose, those girls who disappeared in Wichinois—for whom ransom notes were never received. Two of the girls pretty wealthy, another that young prodigy who was president of the State University."

"Yes, sir," Kildering nodded. "After that, you may recall, I asked the bureau to make a check-up on a certain type of statutory offense in Wichinois."

Overholt ran a hand in bewilder-

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ment across his forehead. "Yes, I remember. You wanted records of seductions in college towns. Especially where the parents of girls had brought charges against the will of the girl. I didn't know— Good Lord! Did that have something to do with this John Miller?"

Kildering came forward to the desk, and his eyes were very serious. "Mr. Overholt, I am going to ask you a strange thing. I want to request that everything that I say to you here be kept an absolute secret. It must not even be written into reports!"

"Nonsense, Kildering!"

Kildering nodded. "Believe me, sir, this is absolutely necessary. You have seen what John Miller can do. He will tolerate no interference with his plans. He is capable and ready, I am sure, to destroy the entire F. B. I., man by man, leader by leader. The only protection is to keep him from knowing that we suspect his identity!"

Overholt's breath came out in a long gust. It lifted his chest, and there was anger in the flush on his high cheekbones. "You're crazy, Kildering!" he snapped. "I'm going to throw every man in the F. B. I. into this search! No criminal would dare do what you say. Why, damn it, he wouldn't dare!"

On the floor, the chief stirred and whimpered in his throat. *"John Miller!"* he whined. *"Don't let Miller destroy me!"*

Overholt's knotted fists trembled, relaxed. His arms dropped like sticks.

Kildering's voice softened. Pity was in his eyes. "I do not mean that we cannot do anything against Miller, sir," he said. "I only mean that what is done must be accomplished secretly. How he works, I have no idea. So no protection can be contrived against him. Theoretically, psychologists can drive a man insane. They have already accomplished it with lower animals. Presented with an irresolvable dilemma, the mind seeks refuge in insanity. The chief was presented, somehow, with a most primitive and basic dilemma. His will to survive was attacked. He had the alternative of dying or of destroying the threat to his life—John Miller. But he could not destroy the threat, because John Miller is immortal—"

The chief whimpered something indistinguishable and tugged fretfully at his bonds.

Overholt snapped to his feet. His fist pounded the desk. "Damn it, Kildering, tell me who this Miller is!"

Kildering hesitated. His eyes were keen on Overholt's face. "I think I can locate John Miller," he said quietly. "Whether I can then destroy him, I do not know. There can be no question of bringing him to trial. A man with his powers could confound our entire judicial system. Won't you give me a carte blanche on this case—and ask no more? I'm afraid that Miller will strike you down, too!"

Overholt shifted angrily in his chair. "I'd give you that assignment anyway," he said shortly. "Hell, all right! You're running the show from now on. But if you fail to—"

Kildering shrugged. "Then, of course, sir, someone else will have to try his luck. That's our one advantage over Miller—there are more of us."

Overholt nodded, his blue eyes burning into those of Kildering. "I want the whole picture," he said shortly.

Kildering picked up his notebook.

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"I'll read you some of my notes. After those seizures of insanity, I checked carefully to see if any use of drugs was involved. But the men remained in a state of madness. I wrote: 'Fantastic as it seems, apparently some man is causing this insanity by direct pressure of his will against deliberately selected individuals. This is beyond any known human powers.'"

"*Human* powers," Overholt stammered.

Kildering said slowly, "You are familiar with the philosophy of *Ubermensh*."

"Superman?" Overholt echoed. "*Superman!*"

There was fright in the eyes of both men, but those of Overholt showed bewilderment—and Kildering's held grim determination. Overholt shivered. He hunched his chair closer to the desk. "Let's have it," he said hoarsely. He did not seem aware that he whispered.

Kildering nodded. "Three things cause mutations in the genes of species," he said, "so far as is known. Cosmic rays. X rays. Radium emanations. Recently—atom-smashing rays have been added. The wide use of the three latter in modern civilization is bound to cause increasing modification of human beings. Sooner or later, and probably earlier because of this very fact of wide use of the rays, a superman is bound to spring up. He is inevitable."

"Inevitable," Overholt echoed the word, without expression.

Kildering inspected him narrowly, glanced toward the prostrate chief, who had lapsed into a drugged sleep. But Overholt seemed normal enough. It was possible John Miller would not attack him—yet. It was possible—

"So," Kildering resumed, "when I found powers that seemed more than human, I wondered if—superman had arrived. I asked myself what such a—person could be expected to do. The monster baby, found dead near Metropolis, was, from descriptions, not a disease-deformed infant, but something quite different. A mutation. And the scientist who examined it was driven mad! Obviously, then, superman knew his own powers, knew what he was—if I was right. It was apparent, too, that he was trying to reproduce his kind. So I asked the check-up on such offenses." Kildering tossed some papers to the desk. "These dossiers came through last night. I spent the night analyzing them. I was going to report this morning."

Overholt picked up the sheafs of papers, glanced through them hurriedly, while Kildering spoke more urgently, his tone rapid and strained.

"Examination will show four charges against a single man," he said. "A man named John Miller. Most of the valuable data was compiled nine years ago by Morton Eidson—the man who later became police chief of Metropolis and killed himself. I think his suicide proves beyond a doubt that he was on the right track. The chief's use of the name of John Miller confirms it.

"I'll summarize on Miller."

Overholt's hands gripped the papers hard. His eyes had a strange brightness. He scarcely seemed to hear Kildering, but he nodded jerkily now and again.

"John Miller," Kildering said crisply, "is thirty-two. Born in New York City, son of Professor R. B. Miller, specialist in Röntgenology, and Elanor Nichols, his assistant in X-ray work before and after marriage. John Miller's grandfathers

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were Hans Mueller, a pitchblende miner in Central Europe, and John Nichols, also a miner, who worked in nickel deposits in Canada. Both these mines are sources of uranium, the ore of radium. Two generations, subject to genes-changing emanations."

Overholt nodded. Kildering rushed on; his voice showed increased strain.

"Such a family history, if I were correct in my surmise, pointed to other births of mutations—possibly hideous ones. John Miller had two brothers. One died at birth, a hideously misshapen creature. The other lived six years, a Mongoloid boy."

"An imbecile!" Overholt exploded.

Kildering said heavily: "John Miller's parents recently died of heart failure, but they gave more information before they died. I think the dossier would have been complete without it, but it is confirmation."

Overholt rasped, "Damn it, Kildering, are you saying that Miller killed his own parents to keep their mouths shut?"

Kildering said: "I don't know. It is possible. But Miller— He was a normal nine-month baby. That is, he was carried the regular length of time, but he was incompletely formed at birth. Hence, actually, he was premature. He was in an incubator for nine months. In school, he was at first stupid and believed moronic. He slept a large part of the day. He was fifteen before he left the fourth grade, but only seventeen when he entered high school. At twenty, he entered college, did the course in two years. A year later, he had a doctorate of philosophy. He was twenty-three then. Nine years ago. Our provable record of him ends there."

Overholt's voice was thin, unnatural. "And you call him a superman? He's a monster! A robber! A murderer! Patricide! And depraved!"

"Yes, sir," Kildering acknowledged, "that would be the normal judgment of a man who did these things. But he's not a man. His history points to a superior intelligence, with an unusually delayed maturity. A mutation—superman."

Overholt pulled to his feet. His eyes were wide and he was looking blankly at the wall. He lifted his hands slowly to squeeze his skull between his palms. "Superman—with three millions dollars to continue his criminality" he said thickly. "In God's name, Kildering, what is he planning? What will he do next?"

Kildering's lips twisted in thin determination. "I must find out, sir. Obviously, his headquarters are in Metropolis! But we're men—he's not. We can't predict unhuman behavior."

Overholt's hands dropped. He said shortly "I want a physical description. I'm going to broadcast it, get every cop in the country on his trail. We'll destroy superman—before he destroys us!"

Kildering felt his eyes tighten in their sockets. Overholt sounded so much like an echo of what the chief had cried a little while before—before he lost his mind! Was it possible that Miller was not content with the destruction of the chief? Was he already at work to destroy the entire F. B. I.?

Kildering leaned forward tautly. Watching Overholt, he said softly, "Yes, we must destroy him—but how can we? John Miller is immortal!"

Overholt looked furtively about him. "We must take precautions," he whispered. "Is the door locked?"

Kildering brought his fist up from

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his hip. The blow was perfectly timed, perfectly executed. It caught Overholt on the point of the jaw, slammed him back into the chair. He jiggled there for an instant, then slipped, feet first, to the floor.

Kildering stood bolt upright, rigid. His face was drained of all color, and he closed his eyes.

"We must destroy John Miller," he said deliberately, woodenly, "before he destroys us! But we cannot destroy him because he is immortal!"

Walter Kildering waited through a long, long minute, then he repeated the formula. Afterward, he opened his eyes, and there was a horror there, and a dread in the twist of his lips.

"I'm not important enough to worry John Miller," he whispered. "He isn't trying to drive me insane—not yet!"

THROUGH another minute, Walter Kildering stood very rigidly in the office where his two superiors lay unconscious—and insane. He was realizing to the full how powerful was this John Miller. He had not overestimated superman! The entire bureau could be destroyed, man by man—unless Kildering could stop him!

A sob of mocking laughter thrust up into Walter Kildering's throat. He, alone, against superman? But it had to be that way. Meantime, he must turn the wrath of John Miller away from the F. B. I. It was the only way the bureau could be saved!

Walter Kildering flung himself at the annunciator on the chief's desk and slapped down a cam. He ordered Bill Mayor and Marty Summers released and sent to the chief's office, unattended. He put through a telephone call over a private wire to a noted "inside" columnist of a newspaper hostile to the administration.

"This is a hot tip," he told the newspaperman, and his voice was hoarse, hurried, not his own at all. "The F. B. I. is completely disorganized. The chief has gone insane, and his next-in-command is in very nearly the same fix!"

Rapidly, he told the columnist how the report could be confirmed, of the barricade at the doors and the attempt of the chief to commit suicide—

Kildering pushed to his feet. When Miller heard of this, he should be satisfied—for the present. Walter Kildering was very pale. He was a traitor to the F. B. I.—for its own good. He was about to desert the service—for its own good.

If he succeeded, all would be well. If he failed, his name would go eternally into the black lists of the bureau which he loved, to which he had given the full measure of his life and loyalty.

He had never flinched from death in the service of his country. Why should he shrink from—disgrace?

KILDERING'S face was as expressionless as a chunk of granite when he stepped outside the chief's office to meet Marty Summers and Bill Mayor as they strode choppily up the corridor.

Mayor checked before Kildering and his fists were knotted at his sides. The black slab of his forelock was awry across his forehead, and his eyes were bitter, hostile.

"I'm going to pay you back for what you did today, Kildering," he said hotly. "This isn't the time."

There was a hesitant smile on the blunt, good-humored face of Marty Summers. "I've been trying to tell him, Kildering," he said, "that you had a good reason for what you did.

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I keep telling him—you've never made a mistake in your whole career!"

Kildering met hostility and loyalty with the same stoniness. He had chosen these two to fight the battle against superman. It would be his whole force, his whole army of desperation. Without words, he held out a slip of paper to each man. It was on the private memo paper of the chief's office, and the handwriting was the heavy vertical of the chief, with the boldly scrawled initials at their bottom.

Mayor snapped a slip from Kildering's hand. Then he cursed and looked up.

"What the hell's going on here?" he demanded. "You force a barricade the chief has personally ordered me to hold. Now the chief tells us to take all future orders from you! It doesn't make sense. It's crazy!"

Marty Summers said softly, "I told you Kildering never made a mistake!"

Kildering's eyes softened. He looked quickly away. His voice was quiet, but it held the command which men everywhere recognize and follow—the voice of a leader. "We will leave headquarters at once," he said quietly. "Follow me!"

Kildering swung off down the hall, his shoulders squared. Without meaning to, Bill Mayor found himself following Walter Kildering. Marty Summers marched, too.

No words were exchanged in the elevator, the guard at the barricades honored the slip that Kildering showed them, and he led the way deliberately toward the park. Kildering's eyes swung swiftly about. Very few persons were about. He stepped out on the springy turf, his nostrils wide to the scents of spring. The sun slanted warmly on his shoulders, but Kildering felt cold. He could not get that scene in the chief's office out of his mind.

In the middle of a broad expanse of sunny lawn, he stopped and faced the other two men. They were alone in the middle of populous Washington—alone in more ways than one. Peril was a dark shadow where they stood, though only Kildering was aware of it.

"You are not under my orders," he said quietly. "Those slips that appeared to come from the chief are forgeries. My own. I had to talk to you privately before—I go."

Summers smiled uncertainly. "Why, sure—but a forgery!"

Mayor stared at Kildering, then he threw back his head and laughed. It was a harsh sound. "You, Kildering!" he cried. "You—forge an order! You're lying. What are you trying to keep us out of?" Mayor stared at Kildering again, and he grew very still. "Hell, you're telling the truth!" he said. "Something's up! Forget what I said, Kildering, back there in the corridor. We're with you!"

Summers said, "Look, Kildering, how's about trusting us!"

Kildering looked from Mayor to Summers and felt his heart swell. They had not even questioned his motives in forging orders for them. His voice was even. "I am deserting the F. B. I.," he said. "When you go back, within a few hours, you will learn that there is a traitor in the F. B. I. His name is Kildering."

Mayor said impatiently: "Oh, bunk! We know how you feel about the service. Quit stalling and tell us what it's all about. If you've got a case you're working on, and it's important enough to make you do those things, we're in on it. Eh, Marty?"

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Summers nodded quickly, eagerly.

Kildering said sternly: "Wait! Wait, before you commit yourself. I phoned a story to a hostile newspaper which will make the whole United States believe the bureau is completely disorganized. It's entirely possible that the boys will start hunting me down!"

Mayor said: "For God's sake, Kildering, quit stalling! *We know you!*"

Kildering laughed, and the sound was like a sob in his throat. "You trust me—like that?" he asked, and there was humbleness in his tones.

Summers grinned. "I've never known you to make a mistake, Kildering."

Mayor said impatiently: "Why don't you get wise to yourself, Kildering? You're too brainy not to understand that we'll go with you all the way. Now, come across."

Kildering told them then, not everything, but most of what had happened in the chief's office; about John Miller—but not about superman.

"I phoned the newspaper," he finished, "because I believe it absolutely necessary that Miller should believe his attack on the bureau is entirely successful. Otherwise, he will still destroy it, man by man. If he thinks that the bureau is disorganized he will leave it alone—for a while. Before he attacks again, he must be destroyed!"

Bill Mayor's face was angrily flushed. His fists swung restlessly at his sides. "I don't know how anybody could do all that stuff," he said, "but— By God, I want to get my hands on the man who did that to the chief! Just let me get him across my gun sights! What the hell are we waiting for, Kildering? Let's get going!"

Summers' face was pale. His voice was subdued. "Count me in, Kildering," he said.

Kildering held out his hand, and Mayor and Summers clasped it together. They made a strange, stern picture there in the bright sunlight in the middle of a park lawn, three men shaking hands together. Mayor tossed his head up with that peculiarly gallant gesture of his, and Summers' lips held their slow, pale smile. Desperate twin fires burned in the depths of Kildering's eyes, but hope was higher in his heart.

III.

The city of Metropolis, spread white and glistening beside the brown, carefully walled-out flood of the great Wichinois River, had a peculiar history over the last nine years. There had been a series of catastrophic fires.

The conflagrations had swept away the ratty tenements, the jumbled factory and elevator districts along the river, the unsightly business district. It was a curious thing that each of these fires had struck at a time when the recurrent floods of the Wichinois had crippled water and electric supply.

There had been small doubt in the minds of city officials that the fires were started by an expert arsonist, or perhaps a ring of arsonists, but there never had been any conclusive evidence.

The rebuilding had been very intelligent. The multiple suggestions had come from various sources, almost by inspiration, it seemed. The result was good.

Even the streets had been recharted and a splendid civic center amid park lands formed the exact midportion of the city. Around its verges were the administrative buildings, the neatly laid out shop-

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ping districts with wide thoroughfares spoking out to the suburbs.

Rapid transit ran underground to speed the outdwelling workers to their tasks where this was necessary; the factories were mostly in the carefully zoned environs.

Metropolis was justly known as a model city, and Wichinois was very proud of the results of those fires, despite the tragic loss of life. Of course, if the man responsible for those fires could have been located, he would have been executed.

Berger Street was a minor crossway near the Civic Center, the situation of most of the exclusive shops. It was a difficult place for the F. B. I. men to set up surveillance. All auto parking was confined to the multiple fields tucked away in the riverside parks; it wasn't possible, day after day, to keep a taxi engaged in the corner ranks. More especially since they had come away from Washington secretly, without expense money; without even stopping for their clothing. Kildering had insisted on that.

Mayor and Summers had finally found it necessary to rent a small office in a corner, four-story building—the highest structure in this area—and keep their watch with binoculars. The particular shop they observed had no name on the windows or over the door. The windows were small and each of them displayed only a single tiny vial of perfume set against a bouquet of flowers. It was that kind of shop.

The break came on the eighth day of their watch, near the closing hour of the shop. Marty Summers had just about given up hope; Bill Mayor had been skeptical from the start.

"Kildering must be nuts," Mayor said again from where he lay uncomfortably on the desk, resting his overstrained eyes. "He's gone at this whole thing backward. The man we want is Miller, and he's got us looking for a kidnaped girl that he expects to be walking along the street like anybody else. He's nuts."

Summers smiled. He was usually smiling, and it sat well on the generous width of his mouth. He was young-looking, with a boyish stubborness about the thrust of his jaw. It was his major value, that stubbornness. He had never acknowledged defeat in any issue and he had a loyalty that was unswerving.

"Kildering does queer things sometimes," he acknowledged softly. "It seems silly to expect a kidnaped girl to walk into a shop because she has a taste for exotic perfumes. But Kildering doesn't make mistakes."

Mayor said: "Oh, to hell with it! Miller is the man I want!" He swung his feet to the floor, and the long, lean line of his jaw was sharp. "Just let me get my hands on the mug that—hurt the chief!"

Summers closed his eyes for an instant to rest them from the strain of the glasses. "Kildering said we weren't to mention that name. I don't know why, but he seemed worried about it. Anyway, we can't look for him. We don't know anything about him, except that women are his weakness."

Mayor's large eyes were narrowed. "It's a screwy business. I don't get this not mentioning his name. I don't get how he could do—what he did to the chief. And I don't see why we can't get a description of the mug. Must be plenty of guys knew him at college. A hell of a description! 'Six feet one. Hair medium dark. Eyes medium gray. Usually talks in a very soft voice. Insisted on wearing gloves at all

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times and never was known to strip off his clothes in the presence of others.' Now what the hell does all that add up to?"

Summers was peering through the glasses again. "I don't know," he said slowly, and he sounded worried. "I know I don't like the sound of it. He's the worst murderer we've ever trailed. He's got away with three million dollars, and girls he's supposed to have kidnaped are expected to walk around the streets. And that stuff about the gloves and the clothes. It sounds—*ugly!*"

"It sounds nuts." Bill Mayor swung his feet. His good-looking face was sullen. "I want action! I want to get my hands on—"

Summers' voice cut in sharply, excitedly: "Bill! Let me see those pictures of Marianne Winters!"

MAYOR took one look at the tense line of Summers' body at the window and sprang to his side, snatching the glasses. His left hand gripping a strip of candid photographs of a laughing blonde, trembled a little. He peered through the glasses, compared with the pictures, checked again.

"Hair's black; might be dyed," he whispered. "Those glasses change her profile, but—by God, you're right! It's Marianne!"

Marty Summers' smile was broad on his mouth. "Kildering said she'd come," he said.

Mayor swore. "Old Frozen-face, right again! But how in hell he knew that we would find a kidnaped girl walking around the streets loose—" He was striding across the office. He dragged a felt hat down over his even brows, slapped at the gun under his arm.

Summers was swiftly dialing a telephone number. "Repeat orders, Bill!" he called softly. "Kildering insisted!"

Mayor checked by the door, impatiently. "Follow Marianne at all costs. You communicate with Kildering, pick me up if possible. If not, I carry on and communicate when I can. Do nothing without orders from Frozen-face. Allow no violence, no possible development to persuade me to do anything but follow Marianne." The slap of the closing door cut off his words, and his feet made sharp, hurried echoes down the hall.

Summers got a phone number, asked for "Mr. Walters" and was given another number to call. He did that twice more before Kildering's dead level voice came to his ears. He spilled out his report.

"You were right, Kildering," he began. "Marianne— What? You know? All right. All right, I'll try, but this delay—"

Summers slammed up the phone and was plunging across the room. His quick glance out the window while he phoned had shown him Marianne already climbing into another taxi. He had just time to spot Bill Mayor getting into a second. Bewilderment still made Summers' eyes wide as he raced down the steps toward the street. If Kildering knew they had spotted Marianne, then he must be somewhere in sight of their office and the perfume shop! It was like old Frozen-face to take no chances on failure, even with men he trusted!

Summers knew, without being told by Kildering, that he had a double assignment; not only to trail Mayor and pick up any divergent trails of anyone whom Marianne met, but to keep Mayor from doing anything, hotheaded, that might spoil the success of their plans. Bill Mayor felt the injury to the chief

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as a personal grief, and a matter for personal revenge. But so did they all.

Summers bolted out into the street and was just in time to see Mayor's cab turn the corner into Liberty Avenue. He signaled another taxi and, swinging into the avenue, was relieved to see both Mayor's and the girl's cabs ahead of him.

Now, for the first time, Summers could digest Kildering's swift orders. "Marianne won't lead you to Number One," he had said, using his locution for Miller. "Any person she meets may be much more important than she is. You take any divergent trails; let Mayor stick to the girl."

But Kildering hadn't seemed excited. He never did, though Summers knew that he felt the injury to the chief as seriously, as personally, as did Bill Mayor or himself. And Kildering didn't seem worried about the immensity of the task before them, or their personal danger. But then, he couldn't afford to. Kildering was—the chief!

It was true that Kildering constantly ordered precautions, and that he isolated himself from them. They didn't even know where his rooms were, and there was always this involved telephoning to locate him. But Summers thought that Kildering was wise about that. It was safer to divide forces. Then if —if Miller destroyed one contingent, the other would be left to carry on!

FOR AN INSTANT, Summers' mind flicked to the man they hunted: to the man who went by the curiously anonymous name of Miller. The things about Miller, or Number One, as Kildering preferred to call him, didn't seem to make sense to Summers. He couldn't fathom the mental processes of a man who had coolly murdered, or driven insane, a dozen persons—probably including his own mother and father—yet who had, in his college days, taken such tender care of the girls he had kidnaped. And tender was the word for it. A part of their preparatory work had been an attempt to trace these early loves of John Miller. Then there were these hints of abnormality; John Miller's own brothers, and the "monster" baby whose examiner had gone insane!

That thought sent a shudder through Summers, turned his thoughts to personal matters. He had not communicated with his wife since leaving Washington. Then he had been able to say only that he was going out under secret orders. It was nearer the truth than the bald word "desertion." Anne would have felt better if she could have known he was under Kildering; her trust in old Frozen-face was as great as his own.

Summers had plenty of time to think things out during the two hours that his cab held the trail. Marianne Winters made three more stops, changing cabs each time, but she apparently made only a series of purchases. There were no divergent trails and, just at dusk, he saw Marianne's cab pull up before a small bungalow in the Prince Hills district. Summers let his own cab roll two blocks past the spot and turn the corner before he dismissed it. He had already spotted Mayor's cab, parked with its lights out a short distance down the previous cross street. He hurried toward it.

Mayor, slumped in the back of the cab smoking, nodded casually as Summers climbed in. "Saw you back there," he said. "I want to have a look in that house, but I sup-

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pose we have to report to old Frozen-face first. Better rent a car on your way to phone, Marty. Can't keep a cab parked here indefinitely."

Summers heard a quiet step on the sidewalk beside the cab and whipped about. His hand snapped to his automatic—then he gasped.

"*Kildering!*" he whispered.

Walter Kildering was peering in at them through the open cab window. He nodded easily.

"Come along," he said quietly. "You won't need the cab."

Summers grinned his bewilderment and a load seemed to lift from his shoulders. Just seeing the easy competence of Kildering, hearing his voice, could do that to Marty. None of them spoke again until Mayor had paid off the cab and they were strolling along with Kildering.

Mayor was grinning, and it was apparent he felt the same relief that Summers did. "Well, how do you do it, master mind?" he demanded. "Is it worked with mirrors, or did you just follow Marty?"

Kildering's smile of acknowledgment was faint, and a frown made a knife crease between his brows. "Simpler than either," he said. "I spotted the cab which brought Marianne to the perfume shop, and got her address from the driver. I've rented a furnished cottage across the street from her bungalow and have been staked out there for an hour. The other two 'kidnaped' girls, Rose Darby and Belinda Hayes, are there. But they came separately, and don't live there, since there's only one bed." He turned into the driveway of the cottage he had rented. In the early dusk, the place gave Summers a stab. It looked so much like his own home, in Washington.

Kildering was saying quietly, "I have two cars here."

Mayor was grumbling good-naturedly. "Why not just send us back to Washington, and carry on alone?" he said. "We're just excess baggage."

Kildering smiled faintly once more. He was preoccupied. "I think our discovery is opportune," he said gravely. "These three girls seem to be strangers to each other, from what I've observed. It's as if they were assembling for action."

Mayor chuckled. "Maybe John Miller is going to drop in on his harem!"

Kildering's head whipped toward him. "Mayor," he said emphatically, "you must not use that name!" His face was paler than usual.

Mayor frowned. "Listen, if you're afraid of that mug, I'm not!" he said. "What the hell difference does it make?"

Kildering drew in a slow breath. "Wait until we get inside," he said. He unlocked the door, gestured the two men inside and flicked on lights in the drawing room. "Sit down, please." He settled himself into a chair at the table, and the overhead lighting emphasized the long, powerful lines of his face.

"Mayor, and you, Summers," Kildering said somberly, "I'm afraid I owe you two an apology. I was something less than frank in Washington. I told you all the facts. I did not tell you what I guessed. I was desperately anxious for your help. I may have minimized the danger."

Mayor grunted: "If it was minimized, I didn't detect it. You said we had one chance in a hundred of living to return."

Kildering said slowly: "I think the chances are rather less than that. You'd better know everything that I can tell you. I think we have

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time." He peered toward the bungalow across the road. The girls were moving about, crossing and recrossing the lighted windows.

"I'm not sure," he resumed, "that the mere mention of Number One's name aloud isn't enough to draw his attention to us. You already know that Number One has mental powers beyond human understanding—"

"Beyond *human* understanding!" Summers whispered. "I don't think I've heard you express it that way before!"

"No, I have kept from you my true belief as to—what Number One is," Kildering said quietly, "and I didn't tell you my real fears. I said that the bureau was threatened with destruction. But if Number One could wreck the bureau, killing and driving insane man after man—without once appearing on the scene—he could do the same with—*the government of the United States!*"

Mayor said, "In God's name, Kildering, what do you mean—a revolution?"

"It's a possibility," Kildering said crisply. "I do not say that it is his intention. I think that, if he thinks he is being let alone, the government is safe—for the present. I do not think his plans reach so far as—the White House. For the present."

Mayor asked hoarsely: "God! What is this man trying to do, Kildering? Who is he? *What* is he?"

Kildering spoke slowly. "We must not let our quandary make us careless. Those girls across the street are getting ready to go out. I do not think they will go to Number One. I think they have a task to perform for him which may help us to understand what he is trying to do. As to what he is— Undoubtedly, a mutant of the human species."

Marty said uncertainly, "A mutant?"

"Hell!" Mayor exploded. "You mean this stuff about evolution! Changes in animals and plants caused by the effect of cosmic rays on the genes of a species, producing freaks."

Kildering said: "We'll go out to the cars. Yes, exactly, Mayor. Number One received terrifically superior mental and physical endowments."

"He never," Summers whispered, "allowed himself to be seen unclothed. He's different physically, somehow—"

"A monster"—Kildering's voice was soft—"or a superman. Different from the human species, but sprang from it, as men and apes sprang from the mutations of a single primordial species."

"And this time, we're the apes, huh?" Mayor rasped. "He's got to be destroyed!"

KILDERING's tone was a little grim. "I imagine the apes felt that way about it. I imagine the Neanderthalers felt that way about the Cro-Magnons. Tie a red ribbon around a turkey's neck, and the other turkeys will destroy it. The preservation instinct of the herd."

Mayor's voice held the faintest trace of panics. "He's got to be destroyed!"

Kildering's voice was without expression. "Yes, of course. He must be destroyed. Mayor, if you and Summers decide at any time in this case that I have lost my sanity, you have my orders to—destroy me. *My orders!*"

Summers said uncertainly: "To destroy you, Kildering?" The impact of Kildering's final words drove home the urgency of their task as nothing else that had been said. He

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felt doubts, felt hate rising like heat to his nostrils. John Miller had to be destroyed! He did not think now of government, or of the bureau; scarcely of himself. The entire human species—*apes!*

"Mayor, Summers." Kildering's voice was incisive. "You understand? No human life is important if it prevents our accomplishing the work! You have my orders?"

Mayor said thickly: "O. K., Kildering. And what you say goes for me, too. If any one of us goes nuts, the other two rub him out. We'll just shake on that."

The hands of the three men gripped and clung. They felt afraid there in the darkness. Panic strained at the bonds of their wills. There was a power they did not understand, could not understand, any more than apes could grasp the purposes of the hunter who wants their hides to stuff so as to pose the effigy against a painted canvas in a museum.

Across the street, the voices of women sounded softly, and a taxi bumbled down the street, squealed to a halt. A strangely matter-of-fact sound to men who have glimpsed the abyss, whose horrors their curling nostrils and shrinking ears can only guess.

Kildering's voice came out crisply. "Summers, take the rented car and stick close. Mayor and I will take the other and alternate in trailing. Cut on and off. Do nothing without specific orders!"

Summers stiffened under the commanding tone. Relief flooded him. Thank God for Kildering to give orders. Kildering—who never made a mistake!

IV.

THE PURSUIT led straight toward the city, the girls' taxi was exchanged for a private car at a garage, and finally they were rolling steadily through the drives of the green parks that selvaged the Wichinois River. There were glimpses of the black water, smooth enough to mirror the stars, through the small foliage of spring. Other cars hummed past; tires crisp on the asphalt, and Summers found himself struggling with disbelief.

It was the steadiness of a familiar task, the familiar sounds and smells about him that made the horror he had glimpsed seem so remote. It was not the fear of death that made Summers thrust these things from him; it was the thought of what his wife must be suffering. She would know by now that he was A. W. O. L. She had only the knowledge that he had left with Kildering to support her. There would be money enough for a while.

Marty Summers' mind snapped away from those things as he saw the car he was trailing swing left into a steep gravel drive toward the river. Over against the black loom of the water, the farther shore, he could see the steep prodding silhouettes of big chimneys from some building on the river bank.

Summers' eyes flicked to the rear-vision mirror, spotted the comforting nearness of Kildering and kicked his brake pedal twice to signal; with his stoplight, a left turn. Kildering's headlights lashed out twice across the darkness and, in obedience to the command, Summers pulled his car to a halt.

Kildering leaned out as the cars drew abreast. "Drive over the grass into the cover of the trees," he ordered quietly. "We go on foot from here. That drive the girls took ends fifty yards down—at the city's main electric power plant!"

Summers swung the car obedi-

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ently from the road, but his mind lingered over Kildering's words. Those three girls were supposed to be carrying out some task for John Miller—and they had gone to the city power plant! In Heaven's name, what deviltry was afoot? He quickly hid the car, trotted back toward the road where Kildering was already standing in the blacker shadow of a leafing maple.

Summers was aware of the keen spring freshness of the air, of the moist living scents of the opening earth; the turf resilient under his feet. From the river, a tug piped hoarsely. The entrance to the power-plant tunnel was a black mouth.

"Mayor's staying with the car, in case of a sudden getaway," Kildering said.

Summers nodded, and they crossed the roadway, angled through the rhythmic planting of the trees. The scent of the river was fresher.

"What can they be planning?" Marty asked softly.

Kildering shook his head. "There have been three tremendous fires, of arsonist origin, in Metropolis. They occurred while the power plant was crippled with floods. But I don't think that's it."

Summers felt a coldness creep up his spine. Without any intention at all, he glanced over his shoulder. Those fires, too, were John Miller's work? The high whine of the turbine generators came to him faintly and, pushing through a shrubbery screen, they saw the girls' car parked close against the wall of the building. It was empty. Light streamed out of the high windows of the powerhouse and the hum of machinery was louder. Marty could see the humped, powerful backs of the generators.

The shooting started just as Marty stepped on the gravel of the drive.

Summers flung back into the shrubbery, whipped his automatic from its holster. He realized then that the shooting was inside the power plant. Five slamming discharges lifted above the machinery hum. A man cried out hoarsely.

Summers gasped, "By God!" He lifted the gun and lunged forward.

Kildering's hand clamped down on his shoulder, held him back.

Summers twisted about. "Those she-devils!" he cried. "They're killing men in there!"

Kildering spoke with an enforced quiet that made his voice sound queer and light. "Yes, damn them! But we can't int[illegible]!"

Marty stammered, "C-can't interfere!"

He was still straining against the grip on his shoulder. His gun hand felt hot about the butt of his automatic. He could see the pale luminance of Kildering's face. Kildering's breathing was jerky. His lips were twisted in pain.

"No human life is important," he repeated his orders of earlier in the night, "if it prevents us from accomplishing our work! These girls are our only possible contact with—Number One. If we interfere with them, they will know we are on their trail. We would be—destroyed. It is not that our lives are important, but that we are the only human beings who know the truth about Number One, and are working to destroy him. If we let the girls complete their . . . their mission, they should report to Number One. Even if it's only by telephone, it should help us to trace him. That's what we want."

Summers stepped back into the

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shadows, but he drew a little apart from Kildering. He knew that Kildering was right, knew what it cost Kildering to make that decision, for pain was in every tone of his voice— And yet to be forced to stand by while helpless men were murdered! Summers' teeth locked hard and he jammed his automatic back into its holster. He stole a covert glance toward Kildering. His face held no expression at all—but his eyes were closed, almost as if he —as if he prayed!

The shots and cries had ceased, and there was a sudden diminution in the pitch of the generator whine. A slash of light shafted out across the drive. The door had been opened. Two of the girls stood in the opening. They had guns in their hands and they were staring toward the lighted interior. Easy to take them now—Marty glanced toward Kildering, but there was no change in the motionless silhouette.

Summers' eyes whipped back to the girls. They stood with a braced tension, as if they expected some blow they could not avoid. One of them called out softly: "Hurry, Rose! Those shots may have been heard!"

Summers recognized, with a thinning of his lips, that it was Marianne who called out. Marianne, who liked exotic perfume—who had just helped to kill men!

The whine of the generators dropped still lower and held to that pitch through a while that seemed interminable. The tug whistle sounded again, and the oily swish of traffic came down from the park driveway.

Summers found himself straining his ears to listen, to hear. That was how he happened to know that the girl's scream that lifted inside the power plant and the sudden accelerated hum of the reviving generators, came at the same split second of time. The girls at the doorway were clinging to the posts, *clinging*. It was as if they fought against a strong wind, a tidal undertow that sought to drag them to the earth. They were calling out, and their voices were muted, without resonance.

"This way, Rose!" they called. "Rose, this way. *Hurry!*"

Summers realized sharply that Kildering's hand was grinding into his shoulder again; that Kildering's voice was sharply sibilant in his ear.

"No, Marty! *Wait!*"

He could see into the power plant now, and suddenly the third girl was visible. She walked with a dragging slowness toward the door. All her body sagged; her arms reached out before her blindly. Her face was terribly pale. It seemed to shine with an internal whiteness. At the door, the two girls continued to call to her urgently. But they did not go inside. They clung to the door and shouted.

It seemed an eternity that the ghostly Rose staggered toward the door. It was impossible that her sagging body should not fall, and yet it did not. Her stumbling feet carried her completely to the sill. It was when she reeled out into the open air that she pitched forward. Summers had one more glimpse of her face as the two girls caught her up and hurried toward the car. Rose's face dangled backward, and caught the full stream of light from the still open doorway.

The girl's face had turned blue!

Summers found himself being drawn back through the woods, and finally he was running beside the long-striding Kildering. But Sum-

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Eyes—eyes that expanded to fill his world and blind him—to fill him with the deadly dilemma that brought madness—

mers ran uncertainly, and twice he slammed into trees that almost stunned him. Horror had him by the throat. In the name of God,

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what had happened in the power plant?

GRAVEL POPPED under the tires of the girls' car as it swept up the drive in second gear. Its motor howled with power. Summers realized they were being distanced, though their path was far shorter. But Mayor would take the trail, and with luck they would be able to swing into the tail end of the procession. Summers felt anger take possession of him. Damn it, *he* wanted to be the one to do the trailing! When John Miller was found—

Summers shivered. It was the first time he had ever yearned to kill a man. He was sobbing curses when he swung in behind the wheel of the car. It was a long time before his breathing and the sick pounding of his heart eased.

Before the end of the park drive, they came in sight of the two cars. Mayor was faithfully on the trail.

Summers said, then, "The girl's face was *blue!*"

"Cyanosed," Kildering said slowly. "Suffocation indicated."

Summers echoed the word stupidly. "You mean—gas?"

Kildering shook his head, but there was a vertical crease between his brows. He didn't speak until, trundling along a dark back street a block behind the fugitive car, they saw the door of the car whip open and a bundle, hideously lax and lifeless, tumble out in the roadway!

"Signal Mayor to take the lead," Kildering snapped. "We'll pick up the girl!"

Summers kicked the brake pedal to signal Mayor, and the third man, from whom they had taken over the chase, sent his car swishing past. It was Kildering who swung the girl into the back of the car. The easy co-ordination of his trained body made the task seem simple. Summers, his face very white, had the car rolling instantly.

"Is she dead?" he asked presently.

"Quite dead," Kildering said, and his voice was puzzled.

Summers' jaw ached from clenching. He began once more the game of leapfrog with Mayor's car on the trail of the two girls. He whirled off the line of pursuit, cut in ahead of the girls and let them pass. Mayor turned off into a side street and presently relieved him when he had dropped back. Then Summers switched off his headlights, cut in the dimmers and presently began to forge ahead again.

But the pursuit was uncomplicated. The two girls drove straight back to Marianne's bungalow and rolled their car into the garage.

"Now what?" Marty asked.

But Kildering had already leaped out of the car and was sprinting toward their own garage. When Summers joined him, he had a set of headphones clamped over his ears—and he was still frowning.

"I managed to put in a phone tap this afternoon," he explained, "but they haven't made a call. When Mayor comes, we'll pay a visit to our murderous neighbors across the street—and restore their friend to them!"

Summers said: "Carry the dead girl there? But why? If we didn't interfere at the powerhouse, when we could have saved some lives—"

Mayor came striding into the garage and had to be told what happened, and his eyes held on Kildering while he listened. When it was finished, he echoed Summers' challenge. "I'm not questioning orders," he said, and his voice had a curious light tightness. "I can see why those men in the powerhouse couldn't be saved, but doesn't the

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same thing hold good now?"

Kildering shook his head. His voice was a little tired. "That held good as long as there was any hope that they would immediately communicate with Number One," he said. "Since they haven't done it so far, it must be because such a report isn't necessary. If we invade their quarters, we may be able to frighten them into making an attempt to communicate with Number One. That will be our chance!"

Mayor laughed shortly, almost happily. "We're dumb, Kildering. Just forgive us. Thank God, we're going to begin to fight!"

Kildering's face was strangely pale. He seemed to be thinking out loud. "The reason that the agents of Number One do not have to report," he said slowly, "must be because there will soon be evidence that they have succeeded. It should come out over the radio, either in police calls or newscasts. Summers, you will listen in on the receiver in the car; bring us news of any development involving electricity, or persons who work with electricity. Come on, Mayor, we've got to move fast!"

MAYOR MARCHED beside him toward the car. He could find no fault with Kildering's logic, but in God's name, what could he expect to eventuate from that attack on the powerhouse?

"I'll carry the girl," Mayor said shortly. "Better for one of us to have his gun clear. And you're the best shot."

Kildering agreed with a quiet monosyllable and Mayor wrenched open the door of the car, peered down at the inert body on the floor. The girl's clothing was disarranged, and it was obvious she had been searched thoroughly. Even in the laxness of death, her face was lovely. Her hair had the crisp brilliance of life, and the blueness had faded. Mayor's hands were tender as he reached for her.

Mayor pulled and the body lurched toward him. Its inertia dragged it to the ground and the head hit the soft turf jarringly. Mayor had seen enough of the dead to know no especial revulsion in their presence, but this shook him strangely.

"Damn—Number One!" he rasped.

Anger ran hotly through Mayor. He stooped and seized the body roughly, heaved it face down across his shoulder. Breath gusted from the compressed lungs in a small wheezing moan. The arms and legs thudded limply against him, and he had to clamp the corpse on his shoulder. He set his teeth fiercely. Without words, he started across the street. The dead girl's hands patted his left thigh, softly, *pat—pat—pat*. There was perfume in the girl's hair and it titillated his nostrils. He lengthened his stride, half running. Behind him, Kildering's feet made no sound.

"Silently!" Kildering's voice soothed him. "We will go on the porch."

Mayor mounted the steps quietly, feeling his choked breath like suffocation. Kildering's voice, muted, was sharp and mandatory in his ear.

"Throw the corpse through the window!" he said. "It will startle them—give us a chance to enter. These girls are killers!"

A strange horror had Mayor by the throat. He stumbled forward —and threw the corpse!

The glass crashed, jangled to the floor as the body smashed through the window. Mayor heard a smothered scream and, for that crazy mo-

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ment, he thought the corpse had cried out! Kildering went past him in a smooth rush of motion. He went through the window, headfirst, diving! Mayor saw Kildering somersault flashingly, land lightly on his feet. Kildering's voice was sharp and cold.

"No, don't try for your guns!" he said. "I never hesitate to shoot murderers, of either sex! John Miller is clever to use women gangsters, but it won't work against us!"

Mayor climbed fumblingly through the window, caught Kildering's gesture to pull down the shades and obeyed. There was muted, rhythmic music from a radio.

The two girls had scrambled to their feet from chairs beside the radio. Mayor looked at their frightened, horrified faces and forced himself to remember that, less than an hour ago, they had shot men to death. It was pretty hard to remember. Marianne's dye-darkened hair deepened her pallor; her blue eyes were shadowed. Belinda kneaded her slim white hands. Her shoulders were hunched as if she were cold.

Kildering's voice was as passionless as death—and as menacing. "Now," he said, "you will talk. You will tell me how to find John Miller!" The gun lifted steadily in his right hand. "Have you seen what .45-caliber bullets can do? But I forgot—you saw tonight what your own bullets did!"

Mayor shook his head, pulled his eyes away from the two girls. He was a little behind Kildering and, once more, the gallant carriage of that upflung head thrilled him. This was strange conduct for Kildering—but Mayor knew no doubts. It was Kildering—it must be right!

The music picked up dulcetly and, a man's voice cut in: "We interrupt this broadcast to bring you a news flash. Metropolis. Four men were murdered in an unexplained raid tonight on the main electric power plant of the city. There was only a slight interruption to power and the police were at a loss to explain the attack. The four men, operators of the plant, were shot."

The music picked up dulcetly and, incredulously, Mayor heard Kildering laugh! It was not a pretty sound.

"Shall I phone the police and tell them who did that?" Kildering asked. *"How can I find John Miller?"*

It was Marianne who got out words. "Who are you?" she asked. "I don't know what you are talking about." Her tone was as cold as Kildering's.

Mayor heard Kildering speak, and the words didn't make sense to him. Kildering said: "I am the son of Police Chief Eidson, whom John Miller killed. You will understand from that why I will not hesitate to kill to learn what I want to know."

Marianne repeated woodenly, "Chief Eidson's son."

She reached to the mantel above the cold fireplace for a cigarette, sat down as she lighted it. She tilted her head back on the cushions of the chair and closed her eyes.

Kildering said, *"Not that way, Marianne!"*

He jumped forward and his fist connected solidly with her jaw. The other girl, Belinda, cried out in a choked voice and ran toward the door.

"Stop her, Mayor!" Kildering snapped.

MAYOR WRENCHED himself into action, flung his arms around the girl and wrestled her back into the room.

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She fought like any other woman, high heels kicking, nails clawing. He flung her violently into a chair, stood over her, glowering. Slow drops of blood oozed from a scratch across his cheek. He told himself again that these girls were killers, and still he did not understand why Kildering had punched the other girl.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Kildering remove a leather case from an inside pocket and take out a hypodermic. "I'd advise you, Belinda," Kildering said steadily, "not to attempt to put yourself into mental communication with John Miller, as Marianne did. No, I'm well aware that you can't do it directly, but I don't know how receptive *he* is. It's probable that by concentrating, in relaxation, you could make it possible for him to form contact with you. That was what Marianne tried. That was why I hit her."

He had the needle ready. He jerked Marianne's sleeve aside, and inserted the needle of a large hypodermic in her arm. He worked the plunger steadily.

"Sodium amytol," he said. "I think that, presently, Marianne will tell us what we want to know."

Belinda huddled into the chair, under the menace of Mayor's lowering regard. She worked her hands. They were slim, inutile. There was a smear of blood on one nail.

"You're wasting time," she said stranglingly. "She doesn't know how to reach—*him!*"

Kildering made no answer. He finished the injection methodically, laid a finger against Marianne's throat pulse. His face was completely impassive. The music from the radio continued to swim placidly into the room. A car bumbled past in the street. Belinda began to sob quietly, her face buried in her hands. Presently, Kildering began to call Marianne by name, sharply, insistently. After a while, she answered, thickly.

"Where is John Miller?" Kildering demanded.

Marianne mumbled, and Kildering prodded her again with the question; again.

Marianne said: "How . . . how dare you! You refer to *him* like that!"

Mayor's head twisted about. Kildering's face still showed no expression.

"Where is *he?*" he asked.

Marianne's head rolled from side to side. Her eyes were half opened. The smile on her mouth was tipsy. "Not Judas," she mumbled. "I won't betray *him!*"

Kildering's eyes held a blazing intensity. His voice was humble. "Tell us, Marianne," he said, "so that we, too, may worship *him!*"

"You want to worship—*him?*"

"Yes, Marianne. Yes. We want to worship *him!*"

Belinda started to her feet. "No, no!" she cried out, gasping.

Mayor whirled on his heel, and his hand lashed out. Belinda crumpled, crying. Kildering's eyes flashed an instant of approval at Mayor, then went back to Marianne. Mayor's thoughts were a confused whirl. What the hell was this Judas and worshiping business? Anybody would think they were talking about a god, instead of a crook who had murdered a dozen people and turned these girls into killers, too.

"Tell us where *he* is, Marianne, so that we, too, may worship *him!*"

Marianne's head rolled fretfully. "Don't know," she whispered. "Don't know where *he* is. Worship the Lord for He is good and His mercy endureth forever."

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Kildering's face seemed to close in on itself. Mayor felt that, although there was no visible change. It was exactly as if Kildering had closed his brain with an actual door.

KILDERING looked sharply about the room. His voice came out harshly: "Knock Belinda out, Mayor! Someone's trying to communicate. I can feel it. Knock her out, *unless you want to die!*"

Mayor wrenched himself out of his abstraction. Belinda started to her feet, and she had a gun in her fist. Before she could pull the trigger, Mayor's fist crashed home. The girl bounced out of the chair, slid to the floor.

Mayor knew that his heart was pounding heavily. He glanced at the shadowed dimness of the hallway, and suddenly he strode there and switched on the light. Nothing there. Of course.

It was then that Mayor recognized the pounding of his heart as fear. He listened to Kildering hammering at Marianne with rapid questions and getting only a lot of religious gibberish. Hell, they treated this John Miller—this Number One as if he were God!"

"How can you communicate with *him?*"

"Oh, pray to *him!*" Marianne chanted. "Pray to the All-Powerful, the All-Good. *He* will set you free!"

Mayor's hands clenched until the muscles of his forearms ached. He was thinking desperately. Those two F. B. I. men in the hospital had questioned a woman—and they were dead!

"Kildering!" he said hoarsely. "We've got to get out of here! That mystery ray the newspapers talk about—"

"We're in no especial danger," Kildering said quietly. "Marianne says the Holy Spirit was to honor them with sons as a reward for tonight. No doubt the reason for the perfume. After the 'honor,' it will be dangerous to approach them. Not now. Miller is just trying to find out what is happening here. I think—"

Kildering broke off, stared down at the two unconscious girls. "Outside, Mayor," he snapped. "Quickly! Back door!"

Mayor whirled and went pounding ahead of Kildering. He whipped out his gun, but it did not make him feel much better.

"What's up?" he demanded.

Kildering stood before him in the darkness behind the house. Feeble rays from the inner lights sifted through the glass panel of the back door, spilled across his face. It was intense, white. His eyes held fire.

"You will remain here, on guard over those two girls," Kildering said quietly. "Number One will communicate, mentally, and probably with Marianne. My guess is that she will attempt to bribe you into releasing her. Permit that, and follow. Number One will almost certainly try to release those two girls from danger—if he can do it without danger to himself. I must warn you of this, however. The release he gives them may be death!"

Mayor said: "Damn it, Kildering, you mean he'll kill them to protect himself? What a hell of a cold-blooded—"

Kildering's lips were faintly sardonic. "Of course, my fellow ape!" he said.

Mayor fumbled his gun, peered toward the house. A scowl drew his brows hard down over his eyes. Presently, his head came up. He tossed the ever-dangling black lock

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back out of his eyes, and there was challenge in the gesture.

"Right you are, Kildering," he said steadily.

"Good luck," Kildering said, and his tone was somber. "You're on your own, Mayor. Summers will back you up at a distance. If anything—interferes with me, you are in command."

Mayor whipped about. "What are you going to do?" he demanded, his voice hoarse.

Kildering's lips twitched. "I am going to pray to *him*," he said slowly.

He turned and marched off into the darkness, and Mayor felt his jaws relax. He swore under his breath. Mayor thought his own post dangerous, but Kildering had chosen the harder task for his own, as he always did. Kildering would deliberately attempt to put his mind in contact with—with *his!* Perhaps it would help to track down Number One! It was more apt to result in insanity!

Mayor turned heavily back into the house. His nerves were taut, but his jaw was set in grim determination. He stood and looked down at the two unconscious girls, at the sprawled body of the dead one beneath the window. Mayor drew in a slow breath, and his eyes turned fierce.

"I just want to get you across my gun sights, John Miller!" he said violently. "I'll show you this particular ape—has teeth!"

IN THE parked car, Kildering had finished giving Summers his quiet instructions about backing up Mayor when the radio program's music broke off abruptly, with the old formula.

"Metropolis," the newscaster rushed on. "Only the safety devices of the subways here prevented serious accidents tonight when the motormen of three different subway trains fell dead at the controls of their engines. Police said that the faces of the three men turned blue. Keep tuned—"

Kildering flicked off the radio, and sat with his face rigid and cold. Beside him, Summers spoke uncertainly.

"Is that it, Kildering?" he asked. "Is that what those girls did at the powerhouse?"

Kildering shook himself visibly. "I'll have to postpone—my prayers," he said. "By interfering with Number One's plans, perhaps I can force him to—pay attention to me."

"Is this it?" Summers repeated.

Kildering turned toward Summers with a faint twist of his lips. "Yes," he said. "For reasons known only to himself, *he* has started on a campaign of mass murder! The elimination of—the apes!"

V.

THROUGH a telephone call, Walter Kildering located Mayor Francis O'Shea at his office and directed there the taxi he had called. Afterward, he leaned back against the cushions and closed his eyes. His head sagged limply in relaxation. His lips lost their rigid line, became gentle. It was a face that Walter Kildering rarely showed to the world.

Music came softly from the radio; the hum of tires on asphalt blended with the bass of the governed motor. A moist softness was on the night air, the promise of a gentle spring rain. Kildering sucked in a slow quivering breath. The world was restless with stirring life, and John Miller gave—*death!*

The music of the radio broadcast

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broke, and the announcer cut in again. Strain was apparent in a peculiar tonelessness that contrasted with the usual blithe elegance of radio voices.

"There have been seven more deaths in Metropolis of this strange sickness that turns the faces of the victims blue. Mayor Francis O'Shea issued a statement that the entire hospital staffs of the city, and its biological laboratories, were being mobilized and that government help had been asked in an attempt to discover swiftly the causes of this illness. Mayor O'Shea emphasized that there was no cause for alarm, but until the causes could be learned, he urged the people to avoid congested areas and to make sure of ample ventilation at all times. There will be more later."

Kildering's relaxation was blotted out. The softened strains of music annoyed him now, and he flicked them off. If Mayor O'Shea were taking such steps at once, there must have been already a more violent reaction on the part of the people than was reasonable to expect.

The taxi driver twisted about. His face was bewildered. "What do you think that stuff is, mister?" he asked anxiously. "I made a run past City Hall just before I got your call, and there's a big mob of people there. Thousands of them. Cheez, guys' faces turning blue!"

Kildering said quietly: "That really means very little. Any sickness that affected the heart or the lungs would cause suffocation and hence turn the faces blue. Can you tell me where I can, at this hour, get hold of some luggage? A secondhand shop or pawnshop would be best."

When the taxi rolled to a halt on the fringes of the crowd about the City Hall, Walter Kildering got out deliberately. He carried a small, worn black bag like a doctor's, and as he moved through the thinner portions of the crowd, his manner was changed. He moved with the crisp, busy stride of a doctor; his eyes abstracted and his face severe.

A man glanced about at Kildering's touch on the shoulder. Then he pushed aside and called out:

"Hey, here comes one of the docs! Let the doctor through!"

Kildering nodded, said, "Thank you!"

The word ran through the crowd. Resentful faces took on an aspect of respect, of hope, even of pleading, as their eyes sought the calm countenance of Kildering. He felt the appeal like a pain in his breast. These people were helpless now, their self-sufficiency sapped in the face of forces they did not understand. They turned to the doctors as to priests for salvation in disaster; presently, unless this plague were checked, they would begin to cry out in anger against these same men. And they would turn to the court of last appeal, the churches. Kildering saw the whole course of the slaughter clearly, during the brief, slow transit through the frightened crowd. He felt his own anger rise, and recognized it as a symptom of a conviction of helplessness. If he could only understand! Why had John Miller determined upon mass murder?

There was some delay at the police-guarded doors of the City Hall, but his F. B. I. credentials gained admittance for Walter Kildering. The speed with which he was ushered to the mayor's office was a new and unneeded proof of the fears and helplessness of the city administration. There were five newspapermen groped outside the door of the private office of the mayor. Kil-

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dering brushed them aside, went through into the mayor's suite.

MAYOR FRANCIS O'SHEA stood on braced, straddled legs behind his desk. He had a mane of grizzled hair, a pale, intent face. His speech was heavy, deliberate.

"You boys from Washington work fast, Kildering," he said curtly. "I hope you can do something."

There was a map of Metropolis spread out on his desk, marked with red crosses. In contrast with the radio announcement of a total of ten deaths, there were scores of them. They covered the entire city. There was a cluster of fifty at what Kildering identified as the city prison farm.

Mayor O'Shea jerked his head toward a spare, stern man who stood beside the desk. "Chief Surgeon Mouline," he said. He nodded toward a shouldery, keen-faced man, whose bushy eyebrows were red and contrasted strangely with a bald and gleaming head. "Chief of Police Parsons. I've got a council meeting in ten minutes. Any suggestions, Kildering? As you see, we've been trying to spot the center of contagion geographically. No luck so far."

Kildering glanced at the map, inspected the three men steadily. Mouline's eyes were hostile and the chief of police, Parsons, was clearly out of his depth.

"I'd like to speak to you privately, Mayor O'Shea," he said. "No offense to you, gentlemen, but Washington has some private information which must be held very closely."

Mayor O'Shea grunted, jabbed carefully tended fingers through his mop of hair. "You Washington boys like mystification, don't you? All right, Mouline, Parsons. Go up to the council meeting and tell them I'm coming. I'll need you there anyhow."

The exit of the two men was angry. Kildering put his eyes on the brooding, suspicious stare of Mayor O'Shea.

"In the first place," Kildering said quietly, "this isn't a plague. It's mass murder by the same criminal who robbed your banks and destroyed your previous police chief, Eidson. No germs are involved. It's done by electricity, and the attack on your main power plant tonight was part of the plan. To stop the deaths, you have merely to switch off all electric power in the city."

Mayor O'Shea's reaction was precisely what Kildering expected. Bewilderment, doubt, and anger carved the man's big squarish face. After twenty seconds, he swore and shouted:

"You're crazy! What the hell are you talking about?"

Kildering felt weariness run through him. What hope did he have of defeating John Miller when stupidity and disbelief fought on Miller's side? But you couldn't blame people too much. It was bewildering—

"What the hell?" O'Shea demanded roughly. "Even if what you say were true, what could any guy gain by killing people wholesale? What's the reason?"

It was a question Kildering couldn't answer, of course, and there was no use in further confusing the issue by expounding the theory of John Miller's antecedents—of supermen. Instead, Kildering turned to the map.

"I'm afraid you'll have to blame Washington mystification for my failure to answer that, Mayor O'Shea," he said, "but look at the map. Check your records. You'll

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find that every one of these deaths is either near a power plant or connected in some way with electricity, if only in the operation of a vacuum cleaner. You can make a simple test. Simply turn off the city's current, and see if the deaths don't stop."

Mayor O'Shea frowned down at the map, glanced uneasily at Kildering. "You know I can't do that," he said fretfully. "It would throw the city into panic! Frankly, I don't believe you, but nobody else has been able to make any suggestion at all. If there were any proof—"

"The first three victims were subway motormen," Kildering said quietly. "Four men were murdered at the main electric plant. What's happened to the men who took over after them? Look at your map. There's the drive through the park close to the power plant. There seem to be fourteen red crosses there and at the powerhouse. Fourteen people dead."

Mayor O'Shea stood with both hands braced on the desk and swore, steadily, without particular attention. His shoulders were oddly hunched. He seemed deformed. Kildering's eyes, half veiled by lowered lids, studied the man's face intently. He seemed honest, confused.

Kildering stepped toward the desk. "You usually have a man polishing your linoleum floors with a machine at this hour, don't you?" he asked flatly. "Do you mind asking where he is at work?"

Mayor O'Shea's head jerked about to face Kildering. "Good Lord! I'll stop him!" He reached toward the annunciator on his desk, but didn't open the cam. "That's nonsense," he said. "Electricity couldn't do it!"

Kildering leaned across the desk, and the steely gray of his gaze stabbed deep into O'Shea's eyes. "You are willing to risk not only that man's life, but the lives of thousands in your city!" he said crisply. "You risk that—because you don't believe! Have you the right, Mayor O'Shea, to make a gamble like that?"

O'Shea shifted uncomfortably. "But, damn it, man," he began, "I don't see how—"

THE DOOR of the office was batted open without warning. A man ran staggeringly across the width of the long room, did not check until his hands struck the edge of the desk. He leaned there, supporting himself rigidly, panting for breath.

"The floor polisher," he whispered. "Dead! His face—*blue!*"

Mayor O'Shea stared at the man without words. His head moved slowly from side to side as if he would deny the thing he heard, but his eyes fixed finally on Kildering. He surged to his feet then.

"I didn't know," he whispered.

Kildering pounded at him. "Do you wish to be known, Mayor O'Shea, as the man who refused to save his city? As the man who, knowing how all these people were killed, refused to do the one thing that could have saved them? It is very simple, you see. Just turn off all the electric power in the city. I can't keep it secret any longer. I'll ask you not to attempt to stop me." Kildering was backing toward the door. "I am going outside and tell the people there that you know how to save the city, and refuse to do anything about it!"

Mayor O'Shea's hand reached out. "Wait," he said. "Wait a moment. You swear to me— No, no, that isn't necessary. That poor man. Mike, wasn't it? Yes, Mike. Poor devil, never harmed a soul in all his

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simple life." Mayor O'Shea lifted both hands to his face, covered his eyes. Presently, his hands dropped and his shoulders came back. "All right, Kildering, you win!"

Kildering opened the door beside him, stood where he could command any who came in.

"Call in the newspapermen," he said, "and tell them. When you turn off your power, they won't be able to print the papers, but they'll find some way of spreading the news." Kildering was aware of the five reporters, crowding in through the door, heard their sharp, shrew questions.

"Gentlemen," Kildering said softly, "Mayor O'Shea will tell you that the plague is spread by electricity. He will tell you that he will cut off all current in the city! My name, gentlemen, is Walter Kildering, of the F. B. I., and I want it published."

"What's this, a gag?" one of the newsmen jeered.

"Is it, Mayor O'Shea?" Kildering asked softly.

Mayor O'Shea's voice roared out: "It's the truth, so help me God!"

The newspapermen were dashing off for their telephones. One of them lingered an instant in the doorway. "Walter Kildering?" he said easily. "*Kill* as in murder, *deer* as in reindeer, *ing* as in Chinese laundry?"

"One *l* and one *e*," Kildering said crisply. "Also quote me as saying this is not a plague, but a mass murder by the same man who robbed the banks here, and whom you christened the 'Unknown'!"

The newspaperman said, "*Wow!*" He turned and sprinted.

Kildering kept his shoulders against the wall. "Sorry to use these methods against you, Mayor O'Shea. And I'm not trying to grab publicity for personal glory. It is my idea that when the criminal responsible for these deaths learns my identity, he will make an effort to—eliminate me. It is my hope to turn the tables on him. I might say our only hope!"

Kildering stood for an instant longer, and his face was drawn and haggard. He smiled then. Frozen-face Kildering smiled! It was gentle, almost womanish in its sweetness. His voice was a little weary.

"Good night, Mayor O'Shea," he said.

He closed the door gently behind him, and Mayor O'Shea stared through a long moment at the closed portal, and said nothing. His assistant waltzed around the desk, slapped at a cam. He was already shouting before he got the connection open.

"*Stop that man!*" he cried. "*Stop that—*"

Mayor O'Shea's hand clamped down on his assistant's shoulder and he whipped him away from the annunciator.

"Let him go," he said. "No, no. Let him go. He's not crazy. So help me, God, I think . . . I *think* he was telling the truth!"

The assistant stared at Mayor O'Shea. "Look, you can't let him get away with that!" he said hoarsely. "You can't let him grab credit for stopping the Blue Death. You gotta do that! Look, this is election year and the boss isn't going to like it if you let somebody from Washington grab the credit."

Mayor O'Shea's face was a trifle bemused. His eyes were staring at the closed door as if he saw a vision. He brushed his hand across his eyes, shook his head as if he cleared it from a stunning blow.

"You gotta grab the credit!" his assistant insisted.

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Mayor O'Shea's eyes turned shrewd. He whipped toward the annunciator. "Stop Kildering," he snapped into the speaker. "The man who just left my office, yes. Of course! He's gone crazy! But be careful; he's armed! Maybe you'd better tell the cops that. They'll know how to deal with an armed man!"

His assistant chuckled. "Geez, boss, you're smart!"

KILDERING was just leaving the elevator when he saw one of the uniformed police go toward a jangling phone near the guarded doors. "Yeah, Sergeant Deal," he rasped. "Stop who?"

Kildering's gun snapped into his fist and blasted in the same instant. The echo slammed dizzily through the high vault of the hall, and Sergeant Deal staggered back from the phone, both arms flung protectingly before his face. The phone was smashed to bits by Kildering's bullet.

"Sergeant Deal," Kildering said quietly, "drop your gun on the floor and disarm your men. At once! I won't hesitate to kill at need!" The quality of command in his voice struck like a thrown knife. He was obeyed. Before the elevator doors opened to release a new flood of uniformed police, Kildering had faded into the crowd.

Lost amid them, he lifted his voice. It was not a heavy voice, but it had a ringing timber that carried it a long way over the heads of the close-packed people.

"I'm the doctor from Washington!" he said. "I told the mayor how to stop the plague, and he refused. Make him stop the plague, or you'll all die! Make Mayor O'Shea stop the plague! All he has to do is to turn off the lights! Come on, men, make him stop the plague!"

It took a few minutes to get the mob moving. A wave of blue-coated police rolled out on the steps before the high bronze doors of the City Hall, and Kildering pointed to them.

"See, the mayor won't stop the plague!" he cried.

The mob roar started as a murmur like distant wind, and it grew with the same speed. It was a hurricane that beat against the portals of the City Hall, that drove the police back before it in spite of the muted hammer of hastily drawn guns. The storm raged into the corridors of the building—

Detaching himself from the remote fringes of the mob, Walter Kildering found a taxi, abandoned by its driver. He climbed in behind the wheel and sent the machine sweeping back toward Prince Hills, toward the death watch he had set Bill Mayor and Marty Summers to keep.

Speeding northward, Kildering was grimly aware of the danger to himself which he had deliberately invited. It was his belief that John Miller could not strike at him, as he had at the chief of the F. B. I., unless John Miller knew his whereabouts. He was by no means sure of that. It might be enough merely to know the identity of his potential victim. But there seemed to be no other way. Efforts to trace allies to John Miller were unavailing; the next logical step was to force John Miller to come after him!

So far, Kildering had been successful. He knew that the mob would force Mayor O'Shea to turn off the electric power. The newspapers, or the radio, which had its own power, would carry to John Miller the name of the man who worked against him —Walter Kildering. Yes, this gave more promise of success. Kildering

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should have been elated. He told himself that. The truth was, he felt unutterably depressed. Who was he, Walter Kildering, to hope that he could defeat John Miller? He had declared that John Miller must be destroyed. He had dared to interrupt the smooth working of John Miller's plans, interfered with his workers.

No question, Walter Kildering thought wearily, about what must happen. He must destroy John Miller before John Miller destroyed him.

A sharp doubt arose in Kildering's mind at that thought. Could John Miller be destroyed? The chief's talk of John Miller being immortal was silly, a madman's ravings. The chief had set out to destroy John Miller, lest he himself be destroyed, but he had gone crazy over a conception that John Miller was immortal.

Driving steadily northward, Walter Kildering threw back his head and laughed. Silly idea, a man being immortal. But, of course, John Miller wasn't a man. Not in the scientific sense. He was a mutation of the species, a superman—

KILDERING found that his hands gripped the steering wheel with a terrible tightness. His arms were so rigid that it was hard for him to turn the wheel at all. He glanced about him at the darkness that crowded close and impenetrable about the car. He realized that the sky was overcast and that a slow-falling rain blurred the windshield. He reached out and switched on the windshield wiper, and the monotonous clicking swing of the blade held his eyes like a magnet. It was hard to drive and look at the wiper, but he couldn't help watching—

Its pendulum swing was like his thoughts. "*Kill* John Miller, or *he'll* kill *you! Kill* John Miller, or *he'll* kill *you!*"

The refrain ran on in Kildering's mind. He tried to break the rhythm, and he couldn't. It kept on and on inside his head, until he found his lips moving silently to form the words. He was saying them aloud for some while before he was conscious of it. But now the words had changed a little, a very little.

"You *can't* kill John *Miller*. John *Miller* will kill *you!* You *can't* kill John—"

Walter Kildering tried to stop saying that. He tried terribly hard. He fought first to stop speaking, then he fought with clenching jaw muscles to stop the flow of words. To close his eyes, to do anything to shut out that awful, destructive rhythm.

"John *Miller* will kill *you!*"

He was still speaking the words, hurling them against his clenched teeth. He was shouting them, singing them in a fearful cracked voice that he could not recognize as his own. Walter Kildering coldly gripped the wheel and drove the car. There was a part of him that could sit back and do that. There was another part of him that swung its eyes, its head from side to side with the rhythm of the wiper blade. That part of him chanted this absurd dirge of despair.

It was that colder, separate part of Walter Kildering which, with the slowness of clock ticks, beat out the words of his thoughts. Beat them out while the body part of him still chanted the dirge. What Walter Kildering thought was:

"This is madness. *John Miller has driven me mad!*"

Walter Kildering had not, up to that moment, consciously realized the invasion of his brain by the

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power of John Miller. He had invited it, challenged it so that he could find and combat John Miller. And it had come upon him unaware.

Too late, Kildering recognized the nature of the thing that was happening to him. He was shrieking, laughing insanely. He was incoherent with his terror and his madness.

"Save me from John Miller!" he was shouting. "Save me! Oh, God, save me!"

Kildering fought to gain control over himself and he could not. He fought then, with a new purpose. He fought to pull steadily on the steering wheel. His hands fought each other. When his right hand tried to pull one way, his left hand tried to pull the other. His own body was fighting him, at the behest of John Miller!

That was when Walter Kildering used his madman's cunning. His thoughts swayed to the swing of the dirge that John Miller had planted in his brain. His eyes, his head swung. His whole body was a pendulum that swung from threat to panic flight.

Right: I can't kill John Miller.
Left: John Miller will kill me.
Right: I can't kill John Miller.
Left: John Miller will kill me.

Very subtly, very slyly, Kildering kept the thought out of his mind. He wouldn't let John Miller know what he was going to do. It was very simply, really. The street was slimy, wet with the slow fall of the spring rain. His body was swaying. Why shouldn't the taxi swing, too? A little pull to the right, a little one to the left; another to the right, harder to the left.

Yes, the taxi was swaying now to the dirge. It rocked. The motor roared at its governed peak. The tires began to scream in time; a scream to the left, a scream to the right!

Walter Kildering lost his thought, but he kept whipping the wheel left and right. It was beautiful the way the whole universe kept rhythm to the thought of the power of John Miller. The street lights swayed; the street swung and dipped. The tires screamed.

The rhythm broke suddenly. The street was no longer swaying. It was whirling, and the scream of the tires went on and on. The taxi was spinning, lunging toward the curbing, toward the remote small houses set among their framework of shrubs and hedges. Walter Kildering swayed behind the wheel, his mouth wide open, screaming.

It was only in the last instant before the taxi struck that a fragment of thought flashed across his brain. Maybe this, too, was part of John Miller's plan! This madness, and then—suicide!

Walter Kildering screamed. He clasped his futile arms about his head.

The crash of a wrecked car is a peculiarly explosive sound. There is the mingled rip and whine of torn metal, the sound of the blow. Afterward, there is the jangle of broken glass, perhaps the cries of the injured.

This time, the scream came first. And it stopped with the crash. Afterward, there was only the small soft sigh of the night wind, and the gentle *tap, tap, tapping* of the spring rain. Gentle as the rhythm of a mother's finger, shaken in warning at a child. In remonstrance—

VI.

It was not quite dawn when Walter Kildering recovered consciousness, knowing weakness and pain

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and despair. He was aware first of a tremendous singing and chirruping of birds, of the dawn freshness after a night of gentle rain. He could sense that even through the acrid cleanness of antiseptic odors.

When he opened his eyes, he saw the young, tired face of a man in his shirt sleeves, a stethoscope dangling forgotten around his neck.

The man smiled, slowly. "You had a good bit of luck," he said, "choosing my porch for a crack-up, Mr. Kildering. What happened? A skid?"

Kildering's lips moved stiffly. "Yes, luck," he agreed.

He lay quiet, through a long minute, realizing that this man was obviously a doctor. But his luck was greater than that. John Miller had relaxed the pressure upon his brain. He felt an immense weariness, but his mind was clear. He remembered those last few frantic seconds, and his eyes strained wide with recalled horror. He heard the doctor speak soothingly, and shook his head.

"No, it's all right," said Kildering, and his voice was almost normal. "Thank you, doctor. I see you know my name, doubtless my identity. Please tell me, precisely, the nature of my injuries. I realize my left arm is broken. What about my ribs?"

"Three cracked," the doctor smiled faintly. "You also had a very ugly gash across your cheek and throat. Which was why I said you were lucky. I always keep hemostats close by."

Kildering nodded; he felt the tug of his wound. "Loss of blood, then," he said.

Awkwardly, he pushed aside the covers and slid his legs toward the side of the bed. The doctor did not help. He stood, hands resting on the foot of the bed, and watched. His eyes were speculative.

"I won't try to tell you about keeping quiet," he said. "You had a concussion, of course. That arm fracture is double, but not compound."

Kildering had his feet on the floor, and they felt wooden. His legs were rubber. He seized the head of the bed with his right hand. He—stood up.

Sweat sprang out on his forehead. His right palm was slimy against the headboard. He sucked in deep breaths.

"Loss of considerable blood," he said thickly, "but I can manage."

The doctor watched him doubtfully, but Kildering's head came up, and his lips were firm. His eyes burned palely.

"I can manage," he said again.

The doctor said slowly: "Your job must be pretty important. I'll put a note in your pocket in case you keel over again. No more transfusions for another twenty-four hours."

Kildering saw then that there was a strip of adhesive on the inside of the doctor's left elbow. The doctor had given of his blood, as well as his skill!

Kildering said slowly: "I may be able to recompense you some day, doctor. You're . . . more than kind." His lips twitched. "The police have your report?"

The doctor shook his head. "The police are pretty busy. The trucks go by every hour, but the hospitals says they don't need me. They're dying too fast for medical help."

Then Kildering remembered—and saw that the lights still burned! They were bright in the ceiling; they made white spots of illumination on the corners. In some way, he had failed!

He said harshly: "I must be go-

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Mayor stopped for a moment to pull himself together. The Blue Death! It had spread outward thus far already!

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ing! One thing I can tell you, doctor, that may help in some degree: This is no disease that is killing men. It is an electrical emanation. It is spread through the municipal system. If you keep your power turned off in the house, you have a chance to survive!"

The doctor said gravely: "Thank you. Are you sure you have to go?"

Kildering saw that the doctor thought this a vagary of his accident-shocked mind. He could not press the issue. His strength was very far gone. He fumbled into his clothing with the doctor's help, while his mind raced back over the events at City Hall. He had failed there, somehow. John Miller had flicked aside his interference, as casually as he had brushed Kildering out of the picture. It was not through John Miller's weakness that Kildering was alive now. He would have to have the help of Marty Summers and Bill Mayor. Kildering found himself thinking of them longingly. They would not need explanations. Summers would give of his loyalty, and his unswerving service; Mayor of his brilliant courage and wit— If they, too, had not been brushed aside by John Miller!

"A taxi?" he asked hoarsely.

"They've all been commandeered by the police to help carry the dead," the doctor said heavily. "The subway station is a block away. I'll drive you there."

"The subways are death traps," Kildering told him dully. "Your radio, or newspapers, should tell you that much. Could I, possibly, hire your car?"

"I'll drive you to your destination if it's not too far," the doctor agreed. "I can't do more than that."

Kildering heard his own voice, muffled by weakness. "You are kind."

THE DAWN was smoky with the stench of burning oil; with other, nameless, odors. A truck trundled heavily past while the doctor backed out his car. The dead were stacked like cordwood. The horizon was dull red with pyre flames, a dozen, a score of them. Kildering's hand, gripping the side of the car, shook a little.

"How many dead?" he asked hoarsely.

The doctor shook his head, driving steadily. The headlights threw a dim patch of orange light. Dawn was gray and murky in the east, and the bird song had ceased. The tires and the motor made the only sound. They passed more trucks. One was stopped and men in glistening suits that covered them from necks to fingertips, faces grotesque in gas masks, carried a dead man out of a house. They swung the body up hurriedly. A woman's wailing rose and dwindled as the doctor's car rolled past.

Kildering beat his fist softly on his knee. "What does the radio say?"

"The stations are all dead, Mr. Kildering. I mean, the mayor ordered them off the air."

Kildering twisted his head about. "You don't believe my theory of the electricity. Is that because you have been using it extensively during the night?"

The doctor swung out into an avenue, drove a little more rapidly. There was another fire in the east now: the sun.

"I made X rays, of course," he said. "We also cook by electricity."

Kildering lifted his hand to his forehead, leaned on it. He couldn't be wrong about it, unless there had been some other reason for the raid on the power plant. But the dead were all somewhere near electrical

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units. The prison and the insane asylum had been heavy centers of death, judging from O'Shea's map; poor simple Mike at the City Hall—But the doctor and he both had survived, despite X ray and stove and other electrical equipment.

Kildering's head whipped up, and his nostrils arched with a shock of discovery. He had been puzzled over John Miller's motive. But now—

"Doctor," Kildering said rapidly, "you will recall recent experiments with the electrical-wave frequencies of the brain, and the incidence of Alpha impulses as compared with individual intelligence."

The doctor's head swung about sharply for an instant before he was forced to look back to his driving. "Why, yes," he said slowly. "As I recall, in low-grade mentalities, the frequency of the Alpha waves was definitely much lower than in higher intelligence."

Kildering nodded. "That was my memory," he said. "Now, compare that fact with this. The asylum population has been completely wiped out; the prison inmates were destroyed in large quantities by this so-called Blue Death. You and I, apparently, remained unaffected. The victims obviously die of suffocation."

The doctor nodded, more alertly. Kildering rushed on.

"The deaths are similar to those that occur under anæsthetics," he said. "Other tests have shown that complete anæsthesia results in a reversal of the electrical nerve impulses. Instead of flowing, as normally, from environs to the brain, they begin, under complete anæsthesia, to flow from the brain to the nerve termini."

"True!" the doctor said alertly.

"I believe," Kildering said slowly, "that this is the key to the entire matter. Certain electrical impulses are being released. They affect only persons with low mental frequency of Alpha waves. In those instances, they induce a complete anæsthesia which results in death."

The doctor said slowly: "It's possible, I suppose, if you knew a hundred times more about the operation of these brain electrical currents than any living man; if, then, you were sufficiently an electrical genius to be able to direct only the proper type of current, and the proper strength— Good God, man are you implying that someone is doing this? That someone is destroying all the low-grade mentalities in Metropolis?"

Two trucks rolled past with their grim loads, bound for the outer region of circling fires. Towers of black smoke marked their locations now, faintly tinged by the red and yellow of flame. The men in their anticontamination garb, their masks, were other-worldly. They lurched to the rumble of their trucks. An infernal scene.

"In God's name," the doctor said hoarsely, "who would do such a thing, and why?"

Kildering shook his head, but his gray eyes glittered like ice. "If you are wise," he said solwly, "you will forget what I have said. You can do nothing about it, except protect yourself."

"That's absolute nonsense!" the doctor said sharply. "No man would do a thing like that! It's a disease, this Blue Death!"

Kildering nodded slowly. "You're probably right at that. It was a wild speculation. Would you let me out here, please?"

The doctor put on brakes. His movements were violent, and his

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throat cords were taut, his face reddened as he shouted.

"It's absolute nonsense!" he cried. "No man would do a thing like that!"

Kildering said: "You're quite right, doctor. Just forget the whole thing! And I thank you, more than you know, for what you have done!"

He turned away, moving heavily toward the cottage he had rented the previous day. His eyes, glancing shrewdly over the street, spotted Summers' car, and Summers' a black shadow behind the wheel. So nothing had happened here! Their watch had been in vain. Why not? John Miller believed that Kildering had been destroyed. If he knew of these other two, he did not fear them.

The doctor's feet rasped with an accent of exasperation on the pavement behind him. The doctor's hand was rough on his shoulder and Kildering staggered, weakly, under the thrust.

"I want the truth!" the doctor said sharply. "Tell me the truth! Who is destroying men like this?"

Kildering saw Summers plunge from the car, race toward them with a drawn gun. He shook his head, moved his right hand in a faint gesture to check Summers. His eyes went to those of the doctor, saw the horror in their depths.

"Don't get excited over a pipe dream!" Kildering laughed at him. "You, a doctor, believing things like that! You're overtired from working over me all night, and I'm lightheaded. You know no man would do what I said. What profit would he get from it?"

The doctor studied Kildering's face. The doctor's eyes shuttled, peering into first one orb, then the other, in the manner of men who stand too close.

The doctor sighed, stepped back and pressed hands to his forehead. "You're right, of course. There would be no profit in it. I think you'll be all right, Mr. Kildering, if you don't overdo it."

"Thank you again, doctor," Kildering said gently. "I hope I can repay you some day for what you have done."

The doctor stumbled to his car and Kildering's eyes followed him pityingly as he drove away. Best for the doctor not to know the truth. It would only throw him in opposition to John Miller—and that was fatal!

Summers came up anxiously. He had a newspaper in his hand.

"We thought you had succeeded, Kildering," he said, "and this stuff against you was just camouflage. The mayor accuses you of killing a floor polisher named Mike and stirring up riots. He says he learned, from that, a way to check the Blue Death. He urges a plentiful use of electrical equipment. Says it will ward off the germs."

Kildering stared at Summers incredulously. He seized the newspaper and his hand shook as he glared at the eight-column box beneath the headlines. No mistake there. The mayor's statement was unequivocal:

"*Use of electrical power, plenty of it, will protect you from the Blue Death!*"

In the face of that, the mayor's tirade against himself, the charge of murder and rioting, became unimportant—even silly. Kildering laughed crazily. And he had thought he had John Miller checked! It was pretty obvious, wasn't it, that John Miller now ruled Mayor O'Shea completely!

Summers' hand touched his arm solicitously. "Is that wrong?" he

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asked. "What happened to you?"

Kildering sobered himself by a violent effort. "I had a little mental brush with John Miller," he said, and his voice was humble. "I owe my present quasi sanity to the fact that he thought me already destroyed. Nothing has happened here? No. Then call in Mayor. We have a job to do. Call him in! Do you think John Miller doesn't know about your watch? We simply aren't important enough to destroy!"

Kildering turned and marched toward the cottage. He stumbled on nothing and threw out an arm to catch his balance. When Summers ran to assist him, he heard something that sounded like a sob. Frozen-face—*sobbing!*

Summers decided he was mistaken.

WHEN Summers brought the sleep-drugged Bill Mayor to the cottage, Kildering sat at the dining-room table with the paper spread out before him. He cut short inquiries about what had happened, tapped the paper with his right hand.

"John Miller's plan begins to take shape," he said, his voice heavy and slow. "This Blue Death is aimed at the destruction of all low-grade intelligences. As such, it probably has already passed its peak and is waning. Mayor O'Shea announces, through the papers, that a philanthropist has purchased from their owners every rented home and apartment in the city. Henceforth, each man owns the quarters he now occupies. They will be given deeds if they report to certain established offices. Owners will be paid from the city treasury at their own figure. And all banks are closed, as a precaution against panic resulting from the plague."

Bill Mayor's head lost its weary droop. "What the hell has all that got to do with John Miller?" he demanded. "They can't do anything like that under the law."

Kildering was frowning. "John Miller is giving every citizen of Metropolis a stake in the city through possession of his living quarters. The banks— I don't know, unless he is stripping them of money to pay off the landowners, or to fill his own pockets."

Summers was slow in finding speech. "That doesn't sound much like a criminal, does it," he said, "giving people their own homes?"

Mayor snorted. "There's a trick in it. He's voiding titles so he can grab them off. Or he plans to slap on taxes—that is, if he's as powerful in the city government as this indicates. Is John Miller the same as Mayor O'Shea?"

Kildering said quietly: "No. According to the paper, all radio stations are closed, and even the mails are being held up to prevent spread of the contagion of the Blue Death. I have an idea that a similar protection will be set up, on some pretext, over telephones and telegraph. Mayor O'Shea has closed every road out of the city, is refusing to permit trains to enter or leave—to protect the good people elsewhere in the State of Wichinois!"

Mayor bent over the newspaper and read hurriedly where Kildering indicated. He began to swear in a low, angry voice. He straightened and still he swore.

"We're locked in," he said harshly. "The city is locked in. No outside communication. And Mayor O'Shea is in John Miller's vest pocket. Damn it, John Miller *owns* this city now! Whatever he wants to do—"

"Whatever he wants to do," Kildering echoed emptily. "Twenty-

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five thousand dead in one night!"

Mayor strode to the window, stood there with his fists knotted behind his back. Marty Summers sat like a drunken man. His thoughts ran in circles. No good questioning those girls across the street any further. They couldn't tell a thing. No need watching them any longer. He didn't know just what Kildering had done, but it was plain that it had been worse than futile. Mayor swung about, came back to the table slowly.

His voice was angry, baffled. "What do we do now, Kildering?" he demanded.

"Yes, what?" Summers asked hollowly.

WALTER KILDERING shifted a little in his chair. There was a dull agony in his side, and his arm was giving him a great deal of pain. His brain was swimming, too, with weakness. He put those things out of his mind. They looked to him for leadership. He must not fail them!

"I'm afraid I overestimated my abilities," Kildering said thickly. "We three are not enough to defeat John Miller. The truth must be carried to Washington. The entire strength of the nation must be thrown against John Miller. I misjudged. I thought John Miller would not strike while we left him alone. But apparently his period of preparation is finished. He is launching his attack."

Kildering dropped his hand. His voice was very earnest. "No man can foretell how far John Miller will press this attack," he said. "He may be content for the present with Metropolis. He may stop when he has conquered the State of Wichinois. He may not stop before the nation, and the world, are under his dominion! I . . . I'm trying not to exaggerate. It's hard, when you deal with John Miller."

Mayor knotted his fists. "Together, we can get out of this trap and spread the word!"

Kildering shook his head. "You will go, Mayor. Summers and I will remain and do what we can against John Miller."

"I won't run away, damn it!" Mayor shouted.

Kildering's lips twisted bitterly. "Running away would accomplish nothing at all, if John Miller were interested in your destruction! You will be in as great danger in Washington, or in China, as you are here. No, no, I'm *not* exaggerating! The chief went mad. I— But I don't matter. Believe me, Mayor, you will be in greater danger on your errand than here in Metropolis."

Mayor nodded crisply. "I'm taking your orders, Kildering. I'll go."

Kildering's voice sounded tired. "Remember that you probably won't be believed. You will have to persuade someone. Perhaps the president himself. From the bureau's viewpoint, you are probably A. W. O. L. If Overholt is still sane— Wait until night, Mayor. Until then, rest and prepare yourself. I haven't examined the defenses, the cordon Mayor O'Shea has set up, but I would suggest the river as the best chance. Come, Summers."

Kildering pushed himself heavily to his feet, swayed an instant before he kept his balance.

"Where are you going?" Mayor asked brusquely. "You're almost out on your feet!"

Kildering shook his head. "That's our job, Mayor. You have yours. And yours is more important. All Summers and I can hope to do is to harass John Miller, and focus his attention here in Metropolis until

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you can rally the nation against him. We will have to move very carefully not to be destroyed at once. I have found out that John Miller doesn't have to locate a man to drive him mad. He need only know his identity."

He held out his good hand abruptly to Mayor. "The country is counting on you, Mayor, though it doesn't know it. I'm counting on you. Good luck."

It was the second time Kildering had smiled. Bill Mayor stared at him, at that gentle smile upon the lips of old Frozen-face, and he could only take the proferred hand dumbly.

It was when Kildering was already going out the door that Mayor found his voice. "I'll get through, Kildering," he said harshly. "Or a piece of me will! Enough to make those damned fools in Washington see sense! Good luck, Kildering!"

Kildering waved his hand awkwardly. Summers grinned back uncertainly over his shoulder, and Bill Mayor was left alone. He found that his eyes were stinging. He was damned sure he'd never see either one of them alive again. He knotted his fists. His head wrenched back and he stared up at the blank ceiling.

"Oh, damn it!" he whispered prayerfully. "Oh, damn it!"

Summers' thoughts were upon death, too, as he followed humbly in Walter Kildering's wake toward the car. He did not question Kildering's decision; could not, since the way lay so clearly before them. They would fight a battle against John Miller, delaying him until the main body of the army, the F. B. I., could engage him. *They would harass John Miller!*

Summers swallowed a hard lump in his throat. It sounded a little like trying to worry God. He fought against a feeling that they would prove no more effective, and his thoughts went fleetingly to Anne Summers, off in Washington.

"Where to, Kildering?" Summers asked briskly, as he slid in behind the wheel of the car.

"Pass by City Hall," Kildering directed quietly. "Our job right now is to locate Mayor O'Shea and await our opportunity to reach him. John Miller has either driven him mad or bought him. At any rate, he is the spear point just now of Miller's attack. The point must be—blunted. Perhaps it will force Miller out into the open. It should at least hamper Miller."

Summers felt a mild sense of shock at Kildering's offhand use of the name, "Miller." Exactly as if he were any other crook they hunted. Miller. John Miller.

"Do you think we can isolate O'Shea in the daytime?" he asked slowly.

"Unlikely," Kildering admitted, "but I wanted to separate myself from Mayor so that he would be safe for a while. "I'm a center of contamination. Through me, Miller might destroy us all. I'm going back to the office in Berger Street. I'll rest there, against tonight. You will keep watch and phone me directly at the first hint of possibly isolating O'Shea.

"Summers, if any doubts of my sanity occur to you at any time, knock me out. If it's still there when I recover, kill me."

Summers' face was very pale, his eyes staring as he glanced pleadingly at Kildering. Kildering was not smiling now.

"I assure you, Summers," he said flatly, "that I'll do the same to you."

Summers shuddered a little, but

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he did not dissent. "Is there no way of protecting ourselves?" he asked. "If there isn't, our first move against . . . against Miller will be our last. You say he need know only the identity of the man he wants to drive insane."

"Or to kill," Kildering added dryly.

"He . . . he can kill people mentally, too?" Summers hesitated.

"I believe so." Kildering's voice was flat, without resonance. "Miller seems to strike at the conscious brain centers; only terminally at the subconscious. If, after each of our raids, we secrete ourselves and knock out our conscious brains for a period of hours, we may escape. Miller can't concentrate perpetually on driving us mad. Even he must use his mind for other purposes on occasion, and I have to believe that it takes a terrific concentration of psychic force either to kill or madden a human being. Only exceptional men are able to control apes mentally; even they could not drive one mad, except by physical means. That may be because their mental organization is too low—"

Kildering's voice trailed off. Summers felt a tremor race through him. If Kildering felt like that, there must be no chance at all! Good Lord! Imagine a brain which surpassed the powers of men by an even greater margin than human brains exceeded those of apes!

Summers swore. It was a thing he didn't often do. "How will we knock ourselves out?" he asked thickly. "Repeated concussion would be damnably dangerous."

"I have quite a supply of morphine."

"But, Kildering, we'll become addicts! How long can we stand up under that?"

Kildering shook his head. He looked out the window of the sedan at the rain-washed freshness of lawns and homes and parks. Below them, in the valley by the sun-sparkling Wichinois River, the buildings of Metropolis formed a many-spired cathedral. White, clean white. There was a black smear across all that purity this morning, a smear of smoke that tainted the air with the stench of burning oil—and burning flesh.

A line of trucks marched uphill slowly, manned by their gargoyle crews, bearing their pitiful freight toward the fires. The bellow of their motors seemed bestial, hungry, carrying their prey to the sacrificial fires.

Kildering's nostrils arched whitely. "I hope John Miller likes the perfume of his altars!" he said harshly.

THE NIGHT was hours old, and the calm white moon, lurid in her veil of pyre smoke, rode high toward the zenith when finally Summers phoned Kildering.

"The boss has gone home," he reported, masking his meaning. "He must be lonesome, he took so many watchdogs with him. Six."

"Come for me," Kildering instructed flatly.

Kildering's whole body felt heavy as he walked down to the street. The gnawing in his side and broken arm had nagged his nerves raw. The wound in his face and throat had stiffened, so that turning his head brought a deep knife stab of pain. Leader of the van against John Miller! Kildering's lips twisted thinly—and even that caused pain.

Summers' smile was warm but weary as he flung open the door for Kildering. "O'Shea's had a busy day," he said flatly. "A succession of demonstrations. A couple of

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mobs were shot up by the police. They were worried about the Blue Death. Three parades chanted O'Shea's praises. They were the people who have been given title to their homes. Lawyers and apartment owners got short shrift. They stood out on the sidewalks shouting, afterward. A lot were arrested. There were mobs around the banks, too. What the hell is John Miller trying to do?"

Kildering shook his head. "All this is preparation for some other move. Or it may be merely a sop to keep the mass of the people partly pacified for—whatever Miller is planning. Where does O'Shea live?"

O'Shea's home was a columned mansion of white stone, set well back from the road behind a formally planted lawn. The grounds were surrounded by a high iron fence, spiked at the top, and every room in the house blazed with light. Two uniformed policemen stood on the porch. There were others at the gates—an even dozen visible guards.

"Probably more inside," Kildering said quietly, as they drove past without checking speed. "Your six must have been merely his mobile bodyguard."

Summers said heavily: "Well, that's out, then. What do we do now?"

Kildering shook his head. "Drive back to the city and find a policeman your approximate size."

Summers' eyes whipped toward him. "You want me to masquerade as a cop? I'd have to have an awfully good story to get through to O'Shea."

Kildering's profile was like chiseled granite. "There's a warrant out for me, according to the papers, and O'Shea made a statement."

"Blaming you, in part, for the Blue Death," Summers said angrily. "He said he would question you, personally, when— *I get it!*"

Kildering said quietly: "Yes. Policeman Summers is going to capture Walter Kildering and take him personally to be interviewed by Mayor O'Shea! Now, find that policeman! A police car, too, would be desirable, but might prove too dangerous."

They didn't get the police car, and the uniform cap had to be padded to fit Summers' head. Walter Kildering was without his hat, and his mouse-colored hair was awry. There was a smear of blood across his forehead; his tie was askew and his collar torn.

Summers didn't have to simulate excitement. He rolled the car at high speed, slammed on brakes at the gate as the two cop guards whipped up their guns.

"I got Kildering!" Summers called out sharply. "Mayor O'Shea wants to see him!"

Kildering glared at the policemen. His right wrist was handcuffed to the dash, in plain sight. "This is stupid," he said harshly, "and Mayor O'Shea will answer for it! You can't arrest a F. B. I. man, you dumb flatties!"

The cop on guard jumped to the running board. "Oh, we can't, huh? You men think you're tin gods!"

Summers shot the car up the drive, jerked to a halt before the porch. He was out in a quick jump, had snapped Kildering's handcuff to his own left wrist. He had a police revolver in his right fist.

"He's not going to get away from me!" Summers said grimly.

"Stupid ass," said Kildering. "Nobody else would find it necessary to beat up an injured man!"

Summers struck at Kildering's head with the gun. "Shut up, you murderer!" he snapped.

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It made a convincing show as they stumped up the steps to the front door, and Summers announced his capture importantly. "Did it myself," he said, "and I'm taking him in, see? I ought to get a sergeantcy out of this!"

THE COPS guffawed, but there was envy in their eyes. They got through to the mayor's study, and O'Shea came down from his bedroom in slippers, with a bathrobe thrown on hurriedly over his pajamas. His mane of gray hair bristled above the excitement of his heavily squared face.

His shrewd eyes took in Kildering's bandages, the handcuff that secured him to Summers' wrist. He gestured sharply at the other uniformed men in the doorway.

"All right," he said curtly. "I can handle this. Close the door! Get back to your posts!"

"I caught him!" Summers said eagerly. "I was going off duty, and I saw him sneaking along a side street. I jumped him!"

O'Shea's eyes whipped toward Summers' face. He was frowning. "You were doing what? Going off duty?"

Kildering's hand snapped free of the handcuff, whose lock was previously sprung. His automatic snouted suddenly from his fist.

"Don't speak, O'Shea," he said quietly, "or you're a dead man. We don't mind dying, if we can take you along! Our story was a little inept, I perceive. Naturally, no man would be going off duty in a crisis like this. Get behind him, Summers, and crack his skull if he tries to call a warning."

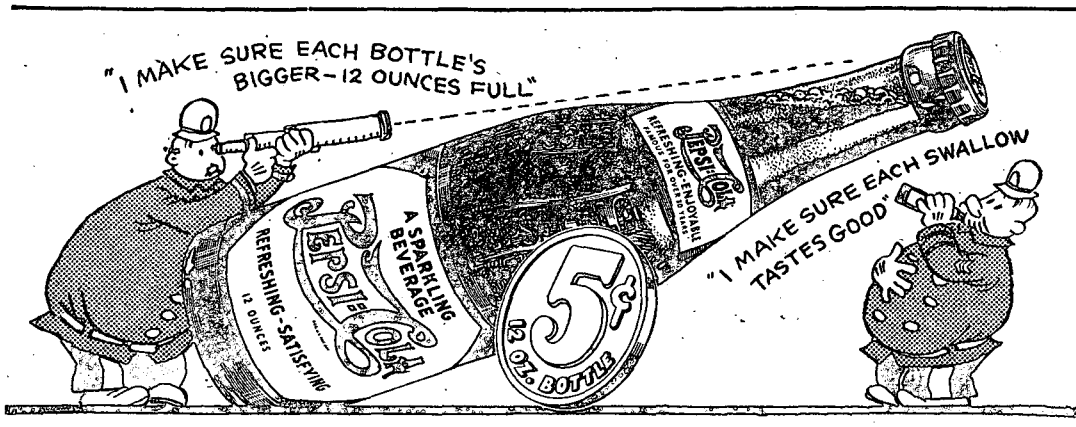
O'Shea's face stiffened under the shock of that pointing gun. He took a slow step backward, and Summers tapped his gun barrel gently against the back of his head.

"Remember," Summers said crisply. "Keep quiet!"

Kildering said: "It was thoughtful of you to have no windows in this room, O'Shea. From the lack of resonance in my voice, I suspect it is fairly well soundproofed, too. Very considerate, O'Shea. Very."

Mayor O'Shea stood on straddled, rigid legs. His head swung, lowering forward, and his voice held contempt. "You will be destroyed the moment I will it!" he said harshly.

Kildering's voice was dead even. "It is possible. If I don't first nullify your will with a bullet. Mayor O'Shea, I told you how the Blue Death was spread. Instead of checking the death, you deliberately



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caused more people to be killed, by urging them to employ electrical power as a preventive. Why?"

Mayor O'Shea laughed shortly. "It is the will of the Lord that they should die!"

"Ah!" Kildering's voice was soft. "The will of the Lord as personally revealed to you?"

A queer exalted light shone in O'Shea's eyes. His head was lifted magnificently; his face transfigured.

"Yes!" he whispered. "He sent his angel to bring me wisdom! Oh, God is great and his mercy endureth forever!"

Summers' face, behind the mayor, was shocked, incredulous. "Miller drove him insane," he whispered.

Kildering shook his head, his eyes keenly on O'Shea's face. "Not insanity, Marty," he said. "Mayor O'Shea has seen the light, and he has been converted to the faith."

"I have seen the light!" Mayor O'Shea chanted, "and I am free! Oh, great is the Lord! The Master! You fool, you cannot harm me! The Lord will send an angel to destroy you! O Lord, hear my plea—"

"Hit him!" Kildering snapped.

Summers' gun barrel slammed against the back of the mayor's head. He lurched under the blow; his knees sagged.

"Blessed are they which are persecuted—" he whispered.

He slumped to the floor, heavily.

Summers stared down, incredulously, at the fallen man. "What the hell is all this?" he demanded roughly. "Does John Miller think he's God?"

Kildering was already at the mayor's desk, shuffling rapidly through the papers and memorandums there. "It's a convenient subterfuge," he said shortly. "Mayor O'Shea believes; those girls believe. An angel of the Lord—which is to say, the psychic projection of John Miller—told him what to do. Naturally, O'Shea obeyed."

Summers had one hand braced on the desk. It was the only thing that held him up. He pressed his forehead. "I feel . . . funny," he said. "My mind—"

Kildering's fist struck as a snake strikes, fiercely and without warning. His eyes were strained wide and there was torment in his face as Summers pitched, unconscious, across the body of the mayor. Kildering was staring, blindly, at a dim corner of the room. A golden light was beginning to glow there!

Kildering sobbed a curse. He flung himself across the room toward the outer door and locked it swiftly. His right hand was trembling, and the curses kept bubbling from his lips. He doubled back toward the desk at a hard run, spilled out the contents of a leather case from his pocket. A hypodermic needle, already filled, tumbled on the blotter. He plunged it into his flesh!

The light in the corner was brighter. In its midst, a shadowy form was beginning to take shape.

On the desk, the telephone whirred. Kildering's hand stabbed toward it, while his eyes held on that growing light.

Death was here, he thought, but he was still fighting with all the strength of his superkeen mind. He must still gain a few hours' delay for Bill Mayor. He and Summers were doomed, except by the luckiest of chances. He might stall off insanity or death with the needle; the police might not come to investigate the long silence of the room. It was unlikely. Mayor was the only hope now; Bill Mayor in his break through the lines for help.

Kildering snatched up the phone.

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His voice held the indignant rasp of O'Shea's tones. "Don't interrupt me!" he snapped. "Don't call again unless I phone! I'm getting a confession!"

The voice of the man was apologetic. "Sorry, Mayor O'Shea, but you said to keep you posted. We just shot a man trying to escape from the city. Shot him swimming in the river. He drowned."

Kildering snapped: "All right. All *right!*"

His hand fumbled as he poked the phone at the cradle again. So that way was closed, too! Mayor had been shot! Kildering's eyes stung. He had to survive, he and Summers! His brain was numbing fast. He could move his limbs only with gigantic effort, and there was no feeling in them. Violently, he fought against the drug for a last minute of movement, of conscious thought. The light in the corner—magnificent now, exquisite. There was a face there, the face of an angel. Beautiful—

Walter Kildering wrenched his eyes away from that compelling face. He groped for the gun on the desk, found it. He stumbled across the room. The sweep of his arm hurled a decanter of brandy to the floor, spilled the alcohol across the rug. He tried to bend over, and he fell to his knees. He began pulling the trigger, so that powder sparks would reach the alcohol fumes.

Some part of his brain counted the shots. He thought he could smell the scorch of fire; couldn't tell. One shot left. Walter Kildering fell toward the mayor. He pressed the muzzle of the gun close, jerked at the trigger.

Walter Kildering, face down on the floor, could not tell whether he had fired that last, utterly necessary, shot. He could not tell because hot pincers were tearing at his brain. Because of the face amid the golden light. A beautiful face—hellishly beautiful—

VII.

IT WAS the moon that defeated Bill Mayor in his effort to escape from Metropolis and bring help to the stricken city. Just around midnight, the moon found a few scattered clouds in which to hide its face. Bill Mayor made his dash in those moments of darkness.

Mayor thought that he had figured out every step of his escape. He loosed his car, motor roaring, to charge down the slope toward the flood wall and the pickets along the river. That was to draw the guards off their posts. He sprinted to a tree he had selected, went up it like a cat and sidled out along a branch that reached over the flood wall.

Exultation was in him then, as he poised on that branch. A swift dive, and he would be away from Wichinois! He plunged out into space—and the moon popped out.

The moonlight caught the momentary gleam of Bill Mayor's body, stripped to shorts, as it flashed through the night toward the water. And one guard saw him. He was alert, gun cocked in his fist, because of the alarm. He was one of the supertrained Metropolis force's best marksmen.

He whipped up his gun and made a snap shot, crying out: *"Got him!"*

Bill Mayor didn't hear him, or hear the shot. He thought, in that flashing moment of pain, that he had struck a rock just on the surface of the water. A rock that drove him sideways, doubled him into a knot in the middle of his dive—

He hit the water like that, went under. A slab of dark water reached

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high against the face of the white concrete wall, silvered as it spattered in the moonlight. A second bullet troughed the surface a moment later, gouging out a towering liquid splinter.

Then the moon, its task completed, hid behind another cloud.

Perhaps it was the coldness of the spring flood that did it. Perhaps, the subconscious working of Mayor's dazed mind. He knew, as he sliced deeper, deeper into the black water, that he had been hit with a bullet. It gave him the anger he needed to survive. The current tugged at him strongly. He helped with feeble flaps of his arms. He couldn't kick, couldn't feel his feet at all.

He broached the surface as gently as the rising dead, floated there, motionless. He heard sharp cries on the banks. The round, menacing eyes of flashlights winked at him from the flood wall. They made pale-brown ovals on the water. The patches of light ran about like questing hounds, madly eager for the kill.

A tormented thunder, a slashing sputter of gunpowder sparks marked the muzzle of a chattering submachine gun up there. The tracers drew crimson streaks across the night. Bullets whipped the water like dirty cream. The froth raced toward him, nearer, nearer— Ten feet away from Mayor, the bullets held steady. They chewed a floating log butt, sleek as a man's head, to silvery bits.

Mayor had enough presence of mind to scream, stranglingly. Somehow, he managed a dive. When he came up again, the flashlights were all focused back there where the log had been.

So Bill Mayor could drift on with the current, alone in the darkness. That darkness was creeping inside him, inside his brain. His side and back were no longer numb. They were an agony.

In Bill Mayor's mind was only one thought, now. He had to keep afloat. He fought to do that. He fought through æons of black and agony-slashed time. He fought so hard that even when hands caught his wrists, reached under his arms, he tried to knock them away.

THAT WAS the way Mayor remembered the black-and-gray time that followed, as a fight to keep afloat. He made it, too. The day came when he opened his eyes and realized he was in the small, tight cabin of a boat. He was in a bunk. And the air had the taint of fish.

The companionway was opened presently, and an unshaven face, bristling with red beard, was poked in.

"Hey," the man said. "Awake, are you? Hey, Lila, your patient's got his eyes open!"

The man stumped down into the cabin. He was barefooted, trousers twisted about his knees. He pared plug tobacco into a calloused palm, had a cold pipe clamped between stained teeth.

"Didn't figure you had a chance, brother," he said equably. "Wanted to throw you back for another time. Seeing as how you fought so. But Lila says—"

The girl was barefooted, too. Yellow plaits were twisted about her head in a coronet. Her body was strong, sturdily built. She looked healthy and extraordinarily happy. Her lips parted generously over strong white teeth.

"So," she said. "Some broth, and you sleep some more. You'll do, brother."

Bill Mayor found his voice was very weak, and his will limp. He

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drank the broth and slept. The second day, he learned that the bullet had torn through his lumbar muscles and set about devising a brace that would take the strain off it and let him walk.

Lila and her father, Jan Posk, were fishing the Wichinois, fifteen miles below Metropolis.

"Can't sell nothing there now, brother," Jan Posk grumbled beside the bunk, while he fouled the air with his stub pipe. "Shoot if you come near them, the fools. Though the plague fires ain't burning no more."

Lila smiled and shrugged. "The river feeds us. After while, we sell again. That Metropolis is funny. Tell me, now, they pay grownup folks to go to school. Tell me, they pay them to play games. Grown men, playing games. Is funny, yes?"

"Who tells you?" Bill Mayor asked sharply.

Lila shrugged again. It was extraordinarily graceful, especially when she wrinkled her nose in that broad grin of hers. "I hear in the villages, among the boats," she said. "Even, they pay a man for having a baby. His wife, I mean, yes."

Bill Mayor frowned over the news, shook his too-long hair back from his forehead and went on with rigging the body brace out of canvas and fishing line. There was a fire in his haggard eyes, and it was in his soul, too. He had lost ten days, and back there in Metropolis, Kildering and Summers—harassed John Miller! Counting on him, fighting a desperate battle in hope that he could get through. And he was failing them.

"Tricks," he said raspingly. "Tricks, to keep the people quiet. So he can rob them! He killed twenty-five thousand people there in one night!"

Jan Posk's eyes were gloomy. "Iss the plague."

Mayor's head snapped up. "It was murder!"

"So!" Jan Posk nodded. "Things like that have happened in the old country. Here, she iss new."

Mayor stared at him, and the fire within him grew to a great leaping flame. Not here in America—

"Help me with this strap, Jan," he said.

Jan Posk took the pipe from between his teeth. His voice was deep, rolling. "Hi! Lila!"

Between them, they strapped Bill Mayor tightly in his brace. He set his teeth, sweating with the pain. He got on his feet. With an oar for a brace, he could stand.

"Tomorrow"—he pushed the words out, panting—"you must put me ashore near the highway to Capital City."

Lila pursed up her smiling lips. "Maybe the day after," she said.

Mayor said, violently, "Tomorrow!"

It was the day after the next that they put him ashore. He had a peeled staff of willow in his fist and he needed it. His clothing was a pair of worn overalls and a shirt; tennis shoes for his feet. His black hair was too long, but he was shaven. Lila had done that.

Bill Mayor stood beside the road that ran close to the river here. He leaned both hands on the willow staff and just the effort of standing there was torment, but he smiled. He meant that smile.

"You've been damned good to me, Jan and Lila," he said. "Maybe I'll make it up to you some day."

Lila smiled, lifted her shoulder. "Iss nothing, brother," she said.

Jan Posk took out his pipe to

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spit. "So, maybe anodder time we throw you back!"

Bill Mayor walked off along the road. His steps dragged and motorists stared at him curiously and did not stop. He had to rest after a half mile. The next time, he made only half that distance. The sweat stood out on his gaunt temples. He drove his flagging body on. It was night when he made the first village, five miles along the two-hundred-mile march to Capital City.

He had brought some money along with him, pinned to the waistband of his shorts; that and his F. B. I. credentials were his only possessions. He dared not use the credentials. He bought cheap clothing and shoes, and he had two dollars left. But the clothing was necessary. Without it, he could never reach any official. He set out again with his willow staff, and luck was with him. At ten o'clock, he got a lift twenty miles upon his way. At three that afternoon, a man in a decrepit car slowed down beside him.

"Can I give you a lift, brother?" he cried. "Inasmuch as ye do it to the least of these, my brethren, you have done it unto me."

Mayor climbed painfully into the front seat, thrust his staff into the back.

"Going far?" he asked faintly.

"Going to kingdom come!" the man cried joyously. "Capital City the first stop! I'm going to preach the new coming, brother. The new and happy coming, when mankind will be free. It is already upon us! Yeah, the wicked have been smitten with a staff of serpents, and salvation is at hand!"

Mayor turned his head slowly, and the hatred that rose within him was cold and frightening. He knew an elation that Capital City was at last within his grasp, but there was menace in this innocent-seeming man. The menace of propaganda!

"You come from Metropolis," Mayor said slowly.

"Mine eyes have seen the glory!" the man chanted. He had his foot down hard on the accelerator. The car rocked and roared, and made thirty-five miles an hour.

Mayor's voice softened. "Tell me about it," he said.

The story was long in coming, interlarded with biblical ejaculations. As the itinerant preacher told it, Metropolis was the promised land. There, all men were free. Purged of wickedness by the plague, they had turned to the One True God. To the Master!

"Has anyone seen the Master?" Mayor asked sharply.

"Has anyone seen the face of the Lord?" the preacher cried. "Yeah, *he* came to me in the night. *He* came in golden light, and *his* face was a face of beauty! Oh, *he* sent unto me an angel—"

"What color was his hair?" Mayor cut in. "His eyes? How tall was he and how was he dressed?"

"Bless you, brother!" cried the preacher. "He wasn't dressed at all, and he carried in his right hand a sword of flame, and in his left hand was—"

But Mayor wasn't listening. There was no sense in this man, and yet he brought certain ominous word. It was true that men were being paid to attend schools, and women, too. *Propaganda agencies,* Mayor thought. And men were being paid to march, too; drilling in the wide parks of Metropolis. *An army forming!*

"No man wants for anything," the preacher cried. "Lo, *he* strikes the rock, and water gushes forth, and *he* feeds the multitude from but five loaves and two fishes. There

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is no longer any money, or need for money. All, all has been rendered unto Cæsar, and all men live in the bounty of God!"

Mayor thought, *"So John Miller has all the money in Metropolis now!"*

"Doesn't anybody even work?" he asked.

"Aye, they work, and the work is blessed—"

It went on like that. A long while before Mayor learned that O'Shea had been murdered in his home; that fire had consumed the building "for his wickedness."

"Doesn't anyone at all oppose this —Master?" he asked then, wondering if Kildering had struck at O'Shea.

The preacher scowled, and anger flashed in his eyes. "All good men are persecuted," he said harshly. "There be those who would crucify *him*, but *he* will triumph, for *he* is great—"

"Who works against him?" Mayor cut in.

"Nay, Beelzebub," the preacher muttered.

Bill Mayor closed his eyes in weariness and tried to rest his strained and tormented back against the cushions. The preacher's voice ran on his ears, but he scarcely heard the man. He had the facts now. Someone—and he almost prayed aloud that it was Kildering—was still working against John Miller! But John Miller was shrewd. He had lulled the people while he robbed them. Plain enough now why he had killed all those men and women: to bring the city to its knees.

One thought was terribly plain to Bill Mayor in that moment. John Miller was all-powerful in Metropolis. He had stripped the city bare. *But John Miller was not satisfied!*

This preacher had been sent out to help spread the propaganda of John Miller, and that meant Capital City was next! Capital City, decimated by the Blue Death; brought to its knees! The whole State of Wichinois would follow, and then—

Bill Mayor was no longer relaxed against the cushions. He sat bolt-upright, and leaned forward, and his gaunt, bony fists were mallets on his knees. The preacher was howling a hymn now at the top of his voice. The car roared and steamed —and the miles crawled toward them, limped out under the wabbling wheels.

It was midnight when the battered car rolled into the streets of Capital City. Bill Mayor knew where he was going. Hoarsely, he stopped the preacher two blocks from where the governor's red brick mansion stood among the ancient cedars and poplars of the Capital Park.

"Come with me, brother," the preacher boomed. "Come, and win salvation! Help me preach The Coming!"

Bill Mayor said grimly: "I'm going to preach the coming, all right. I'll spread the word my way, and you yours."

The preacher cried: "Blessings on thee, brother. The blessings of the New Lord upon thee! Let us pray!"

Bill Mayor limped off. With his gaunt, forward-thrusting head, his heavy hands set upon the staff, Bill Mayor looked a prophet himself. But it was a grim message he brought to Capital City. His lips twisted fiercely. If they would believe him! By God, he'd make them!

His eyes burned toward the multiple lights of the governor's mansion. He was on the verge of the

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grounds now, under the shadow of the ancient trees. He pushed on steadily, ignoring the paths, taking the shortest cut. A hundred feet ahead, there was a small illuminated fountain that hurled its multiple jets through waves of colored light. A policeman's broad shoulders bulked against it. He was spinning his club.

Mayor started to make a circuit, but his movements were too awkward to escape notice. He would have to go straight past the man. If the cop tried to stop him— Mayor's hands knotted on the staff of willow. He shuffled on, fighting the pain in his back.

He was fifty feet away when the man stopped twirling his club. The nightstick dangled by its cord from his hand, and the man twisted his head stiffly as if his collar were too tight. He reached up a slow hand toward it. Suddenly, he was tearing at his collar with both mad hands! His legs were braced widely, but his knees gave. He pitched down, scrambling on the earth. He tried to cry out, and the sound was hoarse and strangled.

Mayor tried to run. The effort wasn't very successful. He reeled, off balance, into a tree, and the pain made the perspiration start over his body. After that, he clung to his staff and contented himself with a rapid shuffle. The policeman's struggles were slowing. He lay flat on his back, and his arms and legs stretched out limply. His breath made a hoarse sound in his throat.

It was when Mayor was still four yards away that even this sound ceased. The man's face—

Mayor said thickly: *"God! The Blue Death is here, too!"*

Through the long moment of realization, Bill Mayor stood motionless over the body, a scarecrow figure clinging to a staff. Presently, he stooped and took the man's revolver. He thrust it into his belt, beneath the swing of his coat. He shuffled on toward the mansion. The tap of his staff was quick, hurried. He leaned forward in the frantic need for haste. He passed two more bodies in the park.

As Bill Mayor fought his way up the broad steps to the mansion, the doors flung open. A man ran out. He ran crazily, with his head arched far back, his legs striding high and blindly. He stumbled at the head of the steps and pitched headlong. His shoulder struck. He bounced. He slithered headfirst, on his back, past Mayor on the steps. His face was blue.

Mayor's face was a ghastly white. His shadowed eyes had a feverish burn. The door swung open when he reached it, and he shambled inside. There was a dead man there, and another at the door of the governor's office.

Whoever was inside wasn't dead yet. It was awful to hear a grown man giggling.

Mayor poked at the door with his staff. It swung open slowly. The hinges made a faint creaking. The door swung halfway and stopped with a soft bump. A man's arm, a man's knotted fist thrust out from behind. There was no movement.

There was a living man in the room. He crouched in a corner, and thrust his beautifully manicured hands at his drooling mouth. That didn't stop the giggles. His eyes were sly, preternaturally bright.

"Are you . . . the Master?" he mumbled. "Nice old Master. Nice Master, go away. Don't hurt me."

He giggled again.

It was the governor of Wichinois.

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BILL MAYOR felt horror crawl sickly through his belly. He made his way heavily into the office and sank into the governor's chair. His eyes rested shrinkingly on the governor himself as he reached for the phone.

They would believe him now in Washington. John Miller had overshot himself that much. Mayor's thoughts moved his lips visibly. He lifted the phone to his ear, and the operator answered. He opened his mouth to give the number that was in his mind, the number of the F. B. I., and suddenly he cried out. He slammed the telephone back into its cradle.

"No," he whispered. "*No*—"

There was no new sound in the room, no new movement. It was at his thoughts that Bill Mayor stared with such terror. If he called Washington, if he directed John Miller's attention that way, the Blue Death might go there, too! And John Miller would send his "angel with a flaming sword."

In his corner, the governor giggled fawningly. "Nice Master. You won't hurt me?"

When Bill Mayor reached for the telephone again, his hand was rock-steady. "Get me the adjutant general of the State. At once! This is an emergency!"

When the petulant voice of the adjutant general of the State answered, Mayor rang out words like blows of steel.

"Call out the entire State militia, at once! Then come to the governor's mansion!" he said. "Yes, the written authority is waiting here for you!"

Bill Mayor hung up the receiver, and his hand went to the gun at his waist. There was a grim, cold smile on his mouth. He settled his shoulders against the back of the chair and waited. He had a plan he thought would work. Useless to talk of a one-man domination of Metropolis, or repeat Kildering's theories of John Miller. This was a Republican State; and the head of the State militia was certain to be a Red-baiter. His course, then, was clear. He would paint the things that had happened in Metropolis as a Communistic revolution!

If that failed, he still had his written authority—Bill Mayor drew out the policeman's revolver and checked the loading.

It was only minutes later that the adjutant general, Beverley Ley, strode into the office. His heavy, mustached face was belligerent.

"What the hell goes on here?" he demanded harshly.

Bill Mayor tossed his badge and credentials on the desk. "I'll tell you about it," he said quietly. "You no doubt recognized the dead people as victims of the Blue Death, which originated in Metropolis?"

Ley grunted. "The Blue Death, huh? But, in God's name, the governor!"

The governor scuttled toward General Ley, clung to him. "Don't let them hurt me, Bev," he whimpered. "Please don't let them hurt me!"

Ley grew white at the touch of the governor's hands, but stood rigidly. His eyes went to Mayor's face, and they were shocked.

"What goes on is this," Mayor said quietly. "In Metropolis, a revolution has been started. They spread the Blue Death to disorganize the city. They have seized the government and all the banks. All factories and property have been confiscated. They even have a new religion!"

Ley said: "Communists! By God!"

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"And now," Mayor went on softly, "they obviously are going to try to take over the State government as well. That is why they have . . . done this to the governor. That's why the Blue Death is striking here!"

The governor whispered, "I don't want to die!"

Mayor nodded crisply. "It is a great chance for a strong man," he said. "A strong man, who put down this rebellion, might even become the country's next president. The governor is plainly incapable of issuing orders."

General Ley's eyes glistened. "The soldiers will be ready in twelve hours, fully mobilized," he said. "Meantime, I can marshal the State police. The lieutenant governor is a weakling. I'll force him to give me authority! Communists, pah!"

"Why bother?" Mayor asked softly. "The governor is still here. He will sign the authorization. We can take him with us."

Ley smiled wintrily. "Excellent!"

It was noon the next day when the troops rolled out of Capital City in commandeered trucks. Mayor, with the governor and General Ley, rode in a big sedan. They were forced to leave the State police behind, for the Blue Death was beginning to wreak its havoc. Less swift than it had been in Metropolis, it had struck down only a thousand persons in the course of the night. But the citizens were terrified. Streams of them clouded the roads northward, and had to be turned back by guards. It was the story of Metropolis over again, but Mayor felt the stirrings of hope. John Miller would not be able to stand against an armed force! The people would be forced to hunt him down and surrender him—

Ten miles from the environs of Metropolis, the army was deployed. Marching patrols spread out through the fields and made contact with other forces that had approached on parallel roads. Scouting detachments were sent racing ahead toward Metropolis. Mayor conceded to himself that General Ley was efficient.

They took over a farmhouse as headquarters and the signal corps rapidly struck up field telephones for communications. Ley had taken on stature in the last few hours. In uniform, he seemed taller. His voice was curt, crisp, and that shine of eagerness remained in his eyes.

"Within three hours, our lines will be complete," he told Mayor. "Then we will summon them to surrender. If they refuse"—his head lifted, his voice took on a rasp—"we'll smash them!"

Mayor said happily: "Three hours? I think we've earned a bit of rest. This back of mine—" He pushed himself to his feet. He still needed the staff, and he stumped toward the first-floor room that had been assigned to him. General Ley wasn't watching or listening. He didn't seem to need sleep, under the stimulation of action. He crossed with his heavy, military stride to where a map was spread upon a portable table and frowned down at it.

Mayor eased himself down upon the bed, stood the willow staff against the wall, and stretched out. His eyes burned wide open at the darkened ceiling. A trapezoid of light from the main room lay across the wide dark boards of the floor. Mayor thought, "Three hours!"

Even if there were no surrender, Kildering and Summers would be on the alert within the city. This, if

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Three dope-sodden wrecks—three hopes, and only these three, for the conquest of the superman!

anything, should force John Miner out into the open. He thought that Kildering would be able to capitalize on that fact!

Mayor smiled and closed his eyes. His strength was depleted, and he was very tired. He slept.

It was the sound of a footfall that awakened him. His eyes flew

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wide and he had, suddenly, all his faculties about him. He felt that he needed them. There was, in the coldness that ran along his spine, a very real sense of danger.

General Ley stood in the doorway, looking at him.

There was no new light in the room. Ley's shadow spread along the floor toward him. He was more rigidly erect than ever; the upfling of his head was challenging.

He had a gun in his right hand.

Mayor made no sudden movement, but his left hand drifted down to the revolver which was thrust into his waistband, while his right glided toward the willow staff against the wall.

"Are the three hours up, General Ley?" he asked quietly. "I must have slept."

General Ley said, "*You traitor!*" His voice rasped.

Mayor swore under his breath, but still he did not try to move. Ley's gun arm was too stiffly ready.

"Traitor to what, General Ley?" he asked.

Ley took a long stride inside the room, a little to one side so that the light reflected more brightly from the floor. Now, Mayor could catch the gleam of Ley's eyes. There was a glitter beneath his mustache. His lips were drawn back from his teeth.

Ley's voice came thickly, harshly. "You almost drove me into a betrayal of my Lord!" he cried. "You treacherous animal! Making me a traitor to my Lord!"

Mayor's breath made a small hissing sound between his teeth. He needed no more than those few swift words. He had been a fool to sleep. In that brief while, John Miller had sprung his defense. Dizzily, Mayor recalled the preacher's words. "An angel of the Lord appeared before me—" Yes, Ley would obey an "angel."

Ley swore in a thin, rising voice. "Die, traitor!" he shouted, and jerked up his revolver!

Mayor whipped the willow staff from the wall and hurled it straight at Ley's face! The general dodged and his gun spat out its scarlet funnel of flame. The bullet crunched into the headboard within a few inches of Mayor's head!

Mayor flung himself sideways from the bed. He cried out at the stab of pain through his back. He thrust at the floor, couldn't rise. His back brace had slipped. He flung himself forward along the floor toward Ley.

The general sprang toward the bed, leaned over it. He was directly over Mayor. The bed protected Ley from attack. Mayor tried to roll under it and there wasn't room; wasn't time. Ley's face, thrust into the shaft of light, had a curiously exalted expression.

"Die!" he cried again, and leveled the revolver at point-blank range.

Mayor's revolver spoke first.

Ley's head was driven back out of the path of the light. His left hand, resting on the footboard, caught the full focus. It clenched slowly, as if the fingers would dig into the wood. That was all that was visible of General Ley, that clenched hand and the sleeve of his uniform.

The fingers went limp, and there was a double thud as his knees struck the floor. He fell, rolled. Flat on his back, his head thrust out into the shaft of light.

Mayor's bullet had struck him just above the eyes, dead center.

FRENZIEDLY, Mayor dragged himself to his feet. Gripping the footboard, he reached out a trembling

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foot for his willow staff. He finally got it. Clinging to the staff desperately, he shuffled toward the door. The revolver dangled from his fingers.

In moments, the sentries would come. He had to think fast. There must be a way to muster these men and launch them against Metropolis. It had been a mistake to wait, a mistake he should not have made. John Miller knew too well how to take advantage of such delays!

Mayor dragged across the main room of the farmhouse. No one stirred. There was no sound in the night except, distantly, the roar of a truck engine. The thrust of the night wind touched the open door of the house, made it swing gently. Insects whirred and buzzed around the electric light.

Mayor stumbled on toward the door. A harder thrust of the wind swung the door about, and the light moved with it. A man's shoe, a putteed leg came into sight. Mayor swore, shouldered the door all the way open.

He whispered, "The Blue Death!"

He went outside, leaned his shoulders against the side of the house. The wind ruffled the hair of the dead soldier at his feet. In the fields, frogs made a shrill piping. The engine of the truck was louder. As he watched, its headlights poked over the crest of a hill toward Metropolis. They dazzled him for a moment, then dropped down across the fields.

Strong black shadows sprang up there—and there were white splotches that were the faces of dead soldiers. The headlights swung back to the road; the motor bellowed. The truck blasted off at top speed toward Capital City.

Mayor's dazed eyes followed the retreating taillight until it popped out of sight over another low hill. His head sagged, and the stiffening went out of his body.

This move, too, had broken against the might of John Miller!

But it was more than that. Mayor's tired mind quested on. New armies could be raised; Metropolis could be bombed off the face of the earth. What good would that do? One man, John Miller, need merely flee and, presently, when he was ready, loose his resistless forces again upon the world.

If, indeed, John Miller waited for the bombers to come. It was so easy, so pitifully easy, for him to loose his powers. Generals turned to converts under the very walls of his city. The governor turned into a helpless madman.

It would be worse than useless to notify Washington and urge an invasion. It would be criminal folly!

So far, John Miller had not attacked Washington, except to remove the chief! Bill Mayor felt a mad urge to drop down on his knees and pray that John Miller would be content to leave Washington alone! And prayer was a thing that Bill Mayor had not thought of in many long years.

Bill Mayor's head lifted slowly, swung about so that he could see the glow of the lights of Metropolis there against the southern sky. His lips drew thinly against his teeth, turned down harshly at the corners.

That was where the battle must be fought, within the environs of Metropolis! There, they must win —or John Miller would reign triumphant over a prostrate nation!

It had been tried, and Walter Kildering himself had acknowledged defeat. No matter. They must fight on, as long as John Miller allowed them!

Bill Mayor clutched his willow

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staff in his hands and shuffled his dragging feet forward. There was no hope in him, only desperation and a grim, stricken courage.

Bill Mayor marched, alone, upon Metropolis.

VIII.

IT WAS NOT LONG after dawn that Bill Mayor hobbled up to the picket line around Metropolis, maintained by the police of the city—by John Miller's men.

A dozen feet from them, Bill Mayor paused and lifted his thin, long hands high above his head, lifted the staff, too.

"May the blessings of the Lord descend upon thee!" He made his voice deep and resonant. "I have seen *his* star in the east, and have come to worship *him!*"

He dropped on his knees then, and bowed his head above his clasped hands. He had purposely drawn his ruffled black hair forward over his brows. Through it, his masked eyes regarded the sentries. They had called out the sergeant of the guard now, and he stood, fists on his hips, watching Mayor. Presently, Mayor heaved himself to his feet. Leaning on his staff, he moved toward the guards.

If they were as fanatic about John Miller as most of the persons he had met lately, they would swallow this gag completely. It was the only way that Mayor, crippled as he was, could hope to break through the careful patrol they maintained.

Mayor made his eyes wide and staring. He mumbled as he moved toward them, and his head was lifted devoutly. He plodded with his staff.

"Hold on there," the sergeant growled at him.

"Peace unto you, brother," Mayor intoned. "Take me unto the house of the Lord, so that I may prophesy."

He focused his eyes upon the sergeant, lifted his staff gravely to press it against his forehead.

"I foresee that you shall be great," he said slowly. "But that man beside you—" Mayor shook his head. "Death is reaching for you, brother. Make your peace with the Lord!"

The man's face turned pale, but the sergeant grinned. "He's harmless. Let him in. We got orders to go easy on these nuts. Good propaganda, you know. Before long, anyhow, the boss is going to have visiting delegations coming here—to see how we do it. Pass in, father."

Mayor intoned his blessing again and went, long-striding, through the picket lines of Metropolis. But his heart was not light. The very ease with which he had been allowed to enter spoke eloquently of the growing power of John Miller. His lips twisted bitterly. Well, he had reason to know how great that power was!

It took him a long while to reach the city itself. From the first public phone that he could locate, he put in a call for "Mr. Walters."

The operator said: "I'm sorry, sir. Nobody here by that name."

He tried the cottage on the hill, and the phone had been disconnected; tried their old office on Berger Street with no better luck. He leaned against the wall of the booth and stared blankly at the phone. This was the method of rendezvous that had been arranged, and it had been disrupted. He was in Metropolis, but he was alone!

For the first time, he was shaken by serious fears for the lives of Summers and Kildering. Somehow, he had not thought that even the power of John Miller could prevail against old Frozen-face.

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Mayor pushed out of the booth and made his slow way along the main streets toward the Civic Center with its surroundings parks. There was no plan in his brain, only a vast weariness and despair. This was the final, crushing blow.

John Miller was triumphant.

SLOWLY, Mayor began to look about him. People went about the rounds of their business as usual, with no thought of the catastrophe that had overtaken them, which threatened their entire civilization. They even seemed happy. There was a school on the corner and, in addition to the children, there were great crowds of men and women filing into the building also. Most of them carried books.

Mayor remembered that John Miller paid adults to study. Propaganda, of course.

And Mayor realized that he was hungry. He turned into a lunchroom, and his hand went hesitantly to his pocket. He had less than a dollar in change. But he had to eat. He limped into the lunchroom and settled upon a stool, heavily. He leaned his willow staff against the wall, glanced at the signs.

"Ham and eggs, with potatoes and coffee, bread and butter," he read, and then he frowned. The price was "1/10 SU," whatever that meant.

The counterman was smiling at him, waiting. Mayor said: "I'm a stranger here. What does one tenth SU mean? I have money, but—"

"A stranger?" The man still grinned. "Oh, that means a tenth of a service unit. The bank over on the corner will give you exchange. I'll do it for you. Ham and eggs?"

Mayor watched the man, whistling cheerfully as he went about fixing his breakfast. He broke off, to talk over his shoulder.

"We don't have money here any more, and it's pretty swell," he said. "The State pays me to run this lunchroom, and I get half of any economies I show. They finance it. In service units."

"The State?" Mayor asked slowly.

"Metropolis," the man threw at him. "I get paid for studying radio. Now, there's something I've always wanted to know about, but it cost too much. Besides, most of those courses were fakes. Now, they pay me to learn it. My wife's got a course in taking care of babies. They decided we could have four."

"Four babies?"

"Yep, and they pay us for each one—keep on paying us. Pretty swell, huh?"

Mayor's lips shut grimly together. Pretty swell! John Miller taking all the money in the entire city, setting out to take all of it in the State. Meantime, he lulled these people into false security.

"And suppose the State decided you couldn't have any babies?" Mayor asked softly. "What then?"

The man turned around, sliding a plate toward Mayor. "Don't know," he said. "Everybody has to take an F. and M. and they give you a card."

"An F. and M.?"

"Sure. Physical and mental test." The man was still cheerful. Mayor was growing to hate that cheerfulness. "You step into some sort of room with funny lights and gadgets. Just walk through it. When you come out, they give you a card. They do say that if your card is bad, it just isn't any use trying to have kids. You can't. Look, mister. There's no need for anybody in this town to do without money. You go to City Hall, and they'll give you a place to live. You stay there six

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months, it's yours. They'll assign you a job, too. And you get paid for studying, like I said. Or marching. Or taking exercise. They got homecrafts, too. They're compulsory, but you get paid big, and you make your own choice."

Mayor said shortly, "Have you found out where the money is coming from to pay for all this?"

The man nodded. "Oh, sure. We get lessons in that, too. Newspapers carried a series on it. It goes like this: When we study, or have kids, or do any of those things, we're doing a service to the State, so we get paid for it. These ham and eggs, now. Used to cost a lot, because so many guys took a profit out of it. Now each guy gets just what his service is worth. Farmer, distributor, me. Same thing with everything. Nobody gets any profits. Take these ham and eggs. What you paid was just what they was worth. I get my cut, the distributor, the farmer. State finances the whole deal and arranges the details."

MAYOR felt shaken. If it would work— But it was all trickery. John Miller was entrenching himself so that his grafting wouldn't be interrupted.

"What about the interest on the farmer's mortgage?" he asked dryly. "What about the profits of the stockholder in the concern?"

The man shrugged. "State owns them all. Farmer owns his land. Interest is against the law. You know, that's a funny thing. I always sort of figured interest was screwy. Like as if money worked and had to be paid for working. There's only so much money in all. All right. Suppose it all earns money, interest, like that. Where you going to get the money to pay the other money for working? It's screwy. Me, I like service units. Want anything else, mister?"

Mayor gave the man a dime, which was all he wanted. He got up and shuffled toward the door. The counterman called out after him.

"Hey, if you're sick, whyn't you go to the hospital?" he said. "They pay you for coming. Keeping healthy is a service to the State."

Mayor stepped out into the street, and the sun was bright and warm. It felt good on his shoulders. He lifted his head and looked heavily about him. There were a lot of people in the parks, taking exercises in groups, playing games, marching in columns.

"But John Miller is a murderer," Mayor muttered. "He killed twenty-five thousand of these people in one night. He's a revolutionist, a traitor. This scheme won't work. It's camouflage so that John Miller can loot the entire city. He'll walk out, and the entire social system will be disorganized. The whole place will be ripe for any kind of revolution. Maybe that's what he wants. Maybe he's a revolutionist of some sort."

He stood there on the sunny street, and he could not get his thoughts straight. He looked back at the lunchroom, and the operator was standing in the door, smiling.

"Pretty picture, ain't it?" he said. "Looks like Metropolis always comes up better than ever. Take those fires, now—"

Mayor said sharply: "What about initiative? What about efficiency? It's all right to talk about service units and no profits, but what are you working for?"

The man shook his head. "You got it wrong. All any guy ever works for is to live. Me, I'm living better than I ever did before. And

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if I run this place right, I got a chance to go up. Run three or four, maybe. If I'm good enough, I'll get a State job managing all of them. And more service units. Guy gets just what he's worth. But no guy can take a whole lot of money and smash another guy who hasn't got much. No rich guy can start crowding everybody else out of business."

"Your taxes will be high!"

The man laughed. "You're hard to sell, mister. Ain't no taxes. State puts a charge for its services on everything that's sold. Management charge. State pays itself in service units. Well, so long; I got a customer. Better go to that hospital, mister."

Mayor tramped toward the park, and his lips were grim. It sounded pretty, but so did Fascism and Communism and lots of other isms, as the propaganda told it. And this man had swallowed propaganda wholesale. He was paid to learn it by heart!

But Bill Mayor was an F. B. I. man, with a job to do; a mass murderer to catch.

THERE was a man standing on a bench in the park making a speech. He was using a lot of biblical language and calling Metropolis the Promised Land. He was talking about the Second Coming. About the New Lord.

Mayor listened to him, and felt his anger rising. He was too feeble to fight with his body. He was stripped of allies and friends. But he could still fight with words.

He climbed up on another bench and lifted his gaunt arms, his willow staff toward the skies. He knew how haggard he looked, and that was well. He made a good prophet.

"You fools!" he cried out. "You utter idiots! Will you kiss the hand that kills your brothers and fathers?"

Mayor got attention all right. The other speaker stared at him, open-mouthed. The people swung about. Men, playing baseball nearby, heard the deep bell of his voice and turned to peer toward the tall, bushy-haired man with a prophet's staff in his lifted hand.

Mayor looked at the men about him, and slowly dropped his hands. "How many of you," he said slowly, "lost loved ones and friends by the Blue Death? Lift your hand, any man who didn't lose some dear one through the Blue Death!"

In all the crowd before him, no hand was lifted. The people in the crowd glanced at each other uneasily.

"The man you are praising," Mayor said slowly. "The man you call the New Lord. He loosed the Blue Death upon you, as God once loosed the plagues upon Egypt. Do you know why?"

Mayor had never done much speaking in public before. But he felt deeply. He was carried away by his anger and his helplessness. And he had these people. He could feel their response to him. He shook the staff.

"He thought these people you love were too dumb to live!" he cried. "That was the whole thing. The Blue Death was aimed at people whom this man—this *man*, I say—did not deem smart enough to live! This is the same man who tells you that you are too dumb to have children. You walk into a room full of lights. If the machine says you're dumb, you can't have children. You can't ever have a child anywhere. Do you know why?

"Those machines sterilize you!"

The other speaker jumped down from his bench and strode through

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the ranks of the crowd. "You are a blasphemer!" he shouted. "You blaspheme the name of the Master!"

Mayor laughed. It was harsh and reaching, his laughter. More men were gravitating toward the bench from which he spoke. Women were stopping, too. He had a considerable crowd. He laughed and jeered down at the man who had challenged him.

"So the Master wants to suppress the truth!" he said. "If you know the truth, tell it to these people! Didn't this man, whom you call the Master, loose the Blue Death on the city?"

The preacher said, "You blaspheme!"

"Answer my question! But you can't answer it!" Mayor shouted. You can't answer it, except to say it is the truth. For I have told the truth!"

The man looked uneasily about him. "It was done for the good of the whole people!" he cried. "For the good of the State!"

Mayor shouted him down. "For the good of the man you serve!" he cried. "To line his pockets with your money, with your wealth! Outside of Metropolis, you couldn't buy a gallon of gasoline, nor a ham sandwich. You can't spend service units anywhere else. And when the Master skips with your money, *what will you live on then?*"

THE SPEAKER turned away and began to make his way rapidly through the crowd. A woman snatched off his hat and hit at him with it. A man caught his coat collar, shouted a question. The man ripped free and began to run.

"Let him go!" Mayor called. "He is only a servant! Listen, listen to what I have to tell you!"

Just behind Mayor, a voice spoke softly. "Good work, Bill, but cut it short. The cops will be here in a minute."

Mayor stiffened. He knew that voice—*Marty Summers!* He did not turn, but his words came out more hurriedly.

"Stop taking these things that happen about you as the acts or dictates of God," he said. "I tell you that they are the works of a man, a man named John Miller. He had a criminal record. He is a robber of banks, a murderer! Ask questions. Ask yourself questions. Ask your neighbors. You have no security, and no freedom, except to do as this man orders!

"This is not the Promised Land. It is a promissory land. You have given your whole wealth, your whole security and future for scraps of paper that have no value at all. You are slaves to a man named Miller!

"This is America! This is the land of free speech, of free religion—*of free men!*

"Then act like free men! Throw off the chains of John Miller!"

Behind him, Summers whispered, "Here come the cops!"

Mayor lifted his staff and pointed where two men in police blue were hurrying through the walks of the park. "There, you see your freedom!" he said. "I dare to speak the truth, and the minions of John Miller come to destroy me! Judge by that, whether I speak the truth!"

He climbed down painfully from the bench, and Summers hurried him into the shubbery that grew thickly against the wall of the park. He felt Summers' hand, warmly tight about his arm; the pain that racked him in his urgent need for haste did not touch him.

"Golly, I'm glad to see you!" Summers whispered. "Kildering and I thought you had been shot, trying

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to jump in the river. Hurry. I've got a car over the wall!"

Mayor's face was white, streaked with sweat. "I did get shot," he said harshly. "Take it easy, man!"

Summers shook his head. "You can't delay. The cops are right behind us. Come on, over the wall! I'll lift you!"

Mayor glanced toward Summers then, for the first time, and his eyes widened with shock. Summers' youthfulness was gone from his face. His cheeks were drawn and gaunt, and he had a pallor that matched Mayor's own. There was a twitching at his mouth corner, and his eyes were shadowed.

THERE was no time for talk then, and Mayor struggled over the wall with Summers' help, stumbled into the car. Instantly, Summers had the engine roaring. They swept into a howling turn, then into a side street. A gun blasted out behind them, and a police whistle screamed. Then the sound was lost. Summers drove grimly, bent over the wheel. He was fumbling in his inside coat pocket, and he dumped a leather case on the seat.

"Give yourself a shot with that needle," Summers said, and his voice sounded strained.

Mayor opened the case slowly, looked down at a hypodermic, whose barrel already held fluid.

"What the hell?" he demanded.

"Morphine," Summers explained shortly. "Knock yourself out quickly, or it will be too late. As soon as John Miller hears of this, he'll set himself to drive you crazy. It isn't hard. All he has to do is think about it for a while. Morphine knocks out the conscious mind, nullifies the attack!"

Mayor fingered the hypodermic needle, deliberately rolled back his left sleeve. "So that's what's wrong with you, is it?" he asked somberly.

Summers' eyes glistened as they rolled toward the needle. He tongued his lips, and his mouth twitched more violently.

"Shoot yourself!" he ordered harshly. "Yes, that's what's wrong with me. Try shooting yourself with morphine two and three times a day for weeks. Damn it, Mayor—"

Bill Mayor jabbed the needle home, pressed down the plunger slowly. His own face was, suddenly, more haggard.

"And Kildering?" he asked slowly.

"Kildering isn't human," Summers said heavily. "He's damned near a superman himself, the way he stands it. He . . . he never seems to sleep. Fill the needle again, Mayor, before you pass out. There's a vial there." He sighed. "Kildering saw the angel with the flaming sword face to face, with morphine already in him, but it didn't faze Kildering. That was when we murdered the mayor."

Mayor said shortly: "Miller had got to O'Shea, eh? I had to kill the commander of those troops out there. I heard about O'Shea. His home burned down, didn't it?"

"Kildering did that, too," he said. "Knocked me out to save me from the angel. Gambled on my recovering in time to carry him out before we were burned up alive. I had on a police uniform. Walked right through twenty cops with Kildering over my shoulder." Summers shook his head. "Kildering's arm hasn't been right since then, though. It's not healing as quickly as it should."

Mayor refilled the needle, put it away in its case and shoved it into Marty's inside pocket. His brain, for the moment, felt extraordinarily clear. The pain in his back was less.

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"We can lick John Miller," he said steadily. "The three of us just got to keep preaching the truth. Get enough people stirred up, they'll throw off John Miller themselves."

Summers whipped around a corner on two wheels, cut through a narrow alley and doubled back the way he had come. "You can't throw off a man who doesn't seem even to exist," he said heavily. "They worship him in the churches here. We found his harem."

"By God!" Mayor cried. "Then we've got him!"

Marty smiled faintly. "It isn't that kind of harem," he said quietly. "It's a very efficient private hospital for the girls and women whom John Miller selects. He's not a libertine, Bill. He just wants to produce as many children as possible, so there'll be more supermen."

"More supermen!" Mayor said dully. "But, good God, we can't go around killing babies!"

Mayor's mind was clouding. The pulsing roar of the motor lulled his senses.

Summers' mouth twitched. It was strangely like the grimace of Walter Kildering. "John Miller does, though," he said. "Miller kills all of his sons and daughters that don't come up to his standard. Don't know just how. Just looks at them, they say, and they die. We set a trap at the hospital one night, and John Miller almost got us. He was smart. Sent his madness to us, *before* he came there. We just managed to guess what was happening and take our shots in time. That's why we keep the needles charged now."

Mayor lolled back on the cushions and the pulsing roar of the motor moved inside of him. He was asleep.

Marty Summers looked at him and there was commiseration in his hollow eyes. "You poor devil," he said, "why in hell didn't you stay away?"

Mayor stirred a little. His fist knotted slowly. "John Miller!" he said. "Gotta destroy John Miller before he—"

He slumped back, and Summers sucked in a quivering sigh. He looked nervously about him. John Miller was working on Mayor now. If Miller decided to tackle him, too— Summers found himself grinding down on the gas. He smiled ruefully and eased off on it. You couldn't run away from Miller. He'd just have to take a chance on it, this time. He was defiant, reckless. To hell with Miller!

There was a haunting fear in his eyes.

Summers cut in behind the cottage where they had been living for two days. It was a terrific struggle to carry Bill Mayor into the house, but he managed it. He dumped him on the bed, stripped him and bent over the wound in Mayor's back. It was pretty badly inflamed. He dressed it.

Marty had just finished that job when he heard a car slide to a halt out back, and presently heard the quiet, tired steps of Walter Kildering. He straightened, sent his low shout through the house.

"Mayor's back!" he called.

Kildering came into the room slowly. "The cops are looking for him, because of that speech in the park," he said. "I was able to identify him from the description. Besides, I was expecting him after what happened to the State army last night. He did a good job there, but it wasn't good enough."

Kildering dropped into a chair,

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tossed a newspaper to the bed. The headlines screamed:

ANGEL TURNS BACK ARMY!

ENTIRE FORCE WIPED OUT BY MASTER!

Kildering said heavily: "I wonder if anyone, anything, can be good enough to eliminate—John Miller."

Summers shook his head. "You can't even tell them that this 'angel' is Miller's psychic projection. They just glare at you and say, 'An angel is an angel!' Try and answer that one. Any luck?"

Kildering kneaded the hand of his broken arm. It was puffy, dry-looking. "I managed to see three big former land holders," he said. "They're willing enough to help—if there's no danger to themselves!" His voice sounded bitter. "What was Mayor's talk about in the park? The papers called it blasphemy."

Summers explained. "I think I may have hit on something, Kildering," he said slowly. "I checked up with twelve women who have lost babies. I'm pretty sure one of them knows Miller and can reach him."

Kildering's eyes sharpened. "Was she bitter?"

"No," said Summers finally.

Kildering got up and left the room. He began clattering pans in the kitchen of the house and Summers went in to help him. "Mayor should be coming around in an hour or so," he said. "That lighter shot you figured out worked on him just in time."

Kildering didn't answer. He was standing in the middle of the floor, with a frying pan in his hand. He stared at it, then moved slowly toward the stove.

"You give me that woman's name," he said curtly. "I'm going to see her."

KILDERING went without waiting to eat, and Marty prepared a meal for Mayor and himself. Kildering came back just as they were sitting down to eat.

Kildering said somberly, "I think, before the night is over, that we'll see Miller!"

Mayor started to his feet, and his chair crashed to the floor. Summers' clenched fists rested on the table.

"When?" he asked harshly.

Kildering's face grim. Color burned in his cheeks. "We'll get a call from a woman in about an hour. I'd better tell you what I did. I told this woman, whom Marty found, all about us, and how we were F. B. I. men intent on destroying John Miller. She wasn't, I discovered, interested in causing him trouble, but she was interested in doing him a favor—not that she said so.

"I told her that she need not fear the insanity or the death that Miller could send, that we had a protection against that. We have been operating here since before the Blue Death and have done a lot of things to hurt Miller. I told her what they were, and what our future plans are."

Summers said, incredulously, "Are you crazy, Kildering?"

Kildering just shook his head. "I told her what rewards she could gain, plus our protection, by telling us how to find John Miller. I insisted that we had the means to protect her against the 'angel with the flaming sword' and the insanity.

"When she tells John Miller about that, he'll believe her. He is undoubtedly aware of his failure to destroy us. Yes, I think that we can count on being led to Miller's hide-out."

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Bill Mayor slumped into his chair. He said hoarsely: "You mean that you're deliberately allowing us to be led into a trap? A trap that will be set the way John Miller wants it? Good God, Kildering, this isn't an ordinary criminal you're playing with. It's . . . *it's John Miller!*"

Kildering's lips twisted. "Yes, I know. Also, it has become quite apparent that, unless John Miller wants us to find him, we will never succeed in doing it. This is the only way. To make John Miller *want* us to find him!"

"He'll destroy us!" Summers whispered it.

Kildering said: "Probably. You have a wife, Marty. Mayor, you're wounded. I'll go alone."

Mayor laughed. "You will, like hell!"

Summers was on his feet. "Listen, Kildering," he snapped. "You can't—"

Kildering leaned across the table and laid out his hand there, palm up. And he was smiling. His rare smile that could be so gentle.

"Forgive me," he said simply, "and be patient. I have so framed the information given to this woman that John Miller will be primarily interested in destroying me. He will believe that I alone know the method of protecting persons from his powers. So he will want to destroy me, first of all. If you decide, after I have finished talking, to help me, that will be your chance. You can start shooting the moment you see him. It should suffice."

Mayor said slowly, "You mean that, while he is killing you, we will kill him."

Kildering said quietly: "Something like that, though I doubt that either one of you would survive me very long in that event. A matter of precedence at the gates of hell. No more. It is the only way."

Summers echoed numbly, "Yes, the only way!" He thought for a moment of Anne, and felt a great emptiness in his chest. He said again, violently, "The only way!"

Kildering said: "The only way to destroy John Miller. But you still have the opportunity to drop out. No, let me explain."

KILDERING leaned forward, rested his forehead against his hand.

"Mayor, you haven't seen much of Metropolis under Miller," he said. "It is a pretty happy place. There isn't much doubt that Miller's genius extends to government. This city is a perfect socialist State. What is more important is that it works! I don't know how much of that is attributable to John Miller's psychic powers and the religious worship with which people regard him. But it works. Now, remember that.

"John Miller destroyed the old city with fire; by psychic suggestion, he planned the new one. I can't prove it, but I'm convinced of the fact. The *modus operandi* was the same, and there was the same carelessness of human life.

"John Miller killed wholesale the lower mental stratum of life in the city. He is preventing the unfit from breeding. He has abolished banks and the banking practices which many people blame, in part, for the great depression. He has made the people happy and self-sufficient. He is educating them.

"The prisons and hospitals are empty, through his greater science."

Mayor spoke, with strain in his voice. "He is doing this to line his own pockets!"

Kildering looked up, his lips twitched. "Perhaps. I think the purpose for which he does all this

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is something more to be feared. Let me go on.

"The people have a large amount of freedom. I think they will have more when John Miller is secure against interference."

Mayor said violently: "You didn't see what he did to the governor of the State, to the people of Capital City, to the National Guard that was about to attack him!"

Summers said slowly, "You, Mayor, haven't seen Metropolis!"

Mayor whirled on him. "Are you defending John Miller?"

Summers' smile was faint. There was a twitching in his mouth corners and his eyes were haggard. Mayor looked at him, then caught Summers' arm.

"I'm sorry, old man. You've made a drug addict out of yourself, fighting him. Kildering—"

"Let me finish," Kildering said, and his voice was weary. "These are the things that John Miller has done. He has committed every crime in the statutes; he has violated human laws—but he has set up something like an ideal government, and the people are happy!

"You have to weigh these things at their full value, for I fully believe we hold John Miller's life in our hands."

Summers leaned forward. "What's the other side, Walter?"

KILDERING STARTED visibly at the sound of his own first name. He wasn't used to it, and for a moment his eyes were uncertain. He reached out and dropped a hand on Summers' wrist. His voice was deeper.

"The other side is simply this," he said. "It is the purpose for which John Miller is breeding so many sons and daughters."

"Purpose?" Summers' voice was vague, and his eyes were blank with inward thoughts.

"What purpose?" Mayor snapped.

Kildering's fist knotted slowly. "It's quite simple, isn't it?" he asked. "John Miller is establishing a race of supermen—to be served by the human race, as slaves!"

Mayor echoed the word blankly. His face flushed and he pitched to his feet.

"*Slaves!*" he repeated.

"Quite well cared for, probably very happy," Kildering said, "but none the less slaves. This is the purpose for which Miller builds. His violence against individuals has been passionless save when two F. B. I. men proached the mother of one of hi. children. She was—shall I say royalty? Then he used the 'mystery ray.' I think we can safely assume that those two comrades of ours, now dead, saw the 'angel with the flaming sword.'

"Miller will continue passionless, allowing people to worship him, destroying the unfit, spreading his perfect State over Wichinois, over the United States, over the world. The human slaves will serve and worship him!"

Mayor said hoarsely: "Good God! Even if we destroy John Miller, we can't stop that! There must be hundreds of supermen and superwomen growing among us."

Summers said thickly: "I feel a little . . . sick. Do you think Miller is attacking?"

"He'll wait," Kildering said grimly. "Mayor, you forget one thing. A mutation can't breed true until the second generation, and then only a small percentage of the inbred stock will be supermen.

"Hundreds of them scattered over Wichinois. Superman will recur among their children, but by that time the leavening of their inheri-

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tance may have lifted the human race to something more nearly approaching parity. Superman is, in any case, inevitable. With the multiplicity of X-ray and radium concentrations, mutations are bound to occur. Inevitably they will, sooner or later, assume the form of another superman. Our race must confront that as inescapable, and prepare for it."

Walter Kildering pushed himself to his feet. His bad arm was puffy and unhealthy, his face drawn as fine as platinum wire.

"There is one point I want to drive home," he said slowly. "It is more important than anything else. If you go with me, remember this: Our decision is made. John Miller must die—*but there must be not even one second's delay in shooting!*"

Mayor's eyes narrowed. "There is a reason for that?"

Kildering leaned forward. "Have you met any of the women whom John Miller has chosen?" he asked. "Have you met a man to whom the 'angel with the flaming sword' has appeared?"

Mayor said angrily, "Yes!"

"Then you understand," Kildering said, more slowly. "Men who meet John Miller worship him—*as dogs do men!*"

Kildering looked at Mayor and Summers fixedly, felt the resolution in their eyes.

"It is a thing to fear," he said finally. "We must shoot before we become—*dogs!*"

He sat down then, and his voice turned dull. "That's the whole picture, gentlemen. My own decision is made. The rest is up to you."

Mayor's lips pulled down thinly. He whipped out his revolver, swiftly checked its loading.

Summers was utterly pale. "I think we should each have two guns," he said harshly. "We don't know how many seconds we'll be able to shoot. An increased rate of fire is desirable!"

It was ridiculously easy, after all these weeks of futile battle, to trail the woman John Miller was supposed to love. The very ease of it was ominous in the extreme. The faces of the three men, in their trailing car, were pale and grim. Their eyes were a little blank, in the manner of men whose thoughts are all within themselves. But in the grimness of their set jaws, in the slow tension of all their movements their determination was written.

The woman they followed parked her car before an ordinary apartment building and went in, eagerly. Summers darted ahead and spotted the apartment to which she went.

"The second floor, a door right opposite the head of the steps," he reported.

Kildering nodded, and led the way up the stairs. Mayor hitched himself up by a violent grip upon the railing; Summers crowded close behind on the other side. So they reached the head of the steps and gazed at the door behind which they would find John Miller!

Kildering looked at Summers, held out his hand. He shook silently with Bill Mayor. There was no need for words. The men took a revolver in each fist, and that way they moved toward the door.

They were a tatterdemalion crew, these men who carried the hope of the human race in their hands. Kildering walked steadily, his head proud, his shoulders braced in a semblance of their old confidence. The sling of his broken arm was dirty,

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and the slash across his cheek had left a crimson, twisted scar.

On his left, Bill Mayor shuffled, and there was still the gaunt fury of a prophet about him. His long black hair was unkempt, and his bones seemed too large for his skin.

And Summers was thin and wasted. His face twitched with the jerk of drug-starved nerves. His eyes burned darkly. He seemed young again tonight, a kid bucking a game that was too tough for him. But fighting; in there, fighting.

They marched to the door like that, these three scarecrow men carrying the hope of the human race—the spirit of all the centuries to come.

Summers reached out to the door. His hand, clutching a gun, could just compass the doorknob, too. He looked at Kildering and met a nod

knob and threw the door wide.

The three men wedged into the apartment of John Miller. They raced forward. One of them shouted. Or perhaps it was all three of them together. It was despair, and rage, and rare courage. Humans, going into battle.

The door vibrated and closed.

It closed, and no guns spoke. Silence—and the door did not open.

Time passed—and the door did not open.

When, finally, the knob turned, it was slowly. The movement of the door, swinging wide, was a deliberate thing; ceremonious.

Walter Kildering and Bill Mayor walked out together, quietly. They looked at each other, not speaking. Their faces were still drawn, still weary, but their eyes were shining.

Summers came afterward, and his head was lifted; his teeth glistened between faintly parted lips. It was as if he listened to far-off music.

Walter Kildering pulled back his shoulders. He glanced toward the door, closed now, and touched his two comrades on the arm to move them toward the steps.

"Come on, men," he said. "Come on. We have work to do—for the ." His voice was reverent, as men speak in the presence of their God.

The three men moved down the steps softly, pride in the carriage of their heads. Three men going downstairs, happy in the service of their master, the service of John Miller; carrying down with them the hope of the human race—the spirit of all the centuries that might have come.

Three slaves.

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THE KRAKEN

by FREDERICK ENGELHARDT

The Kraken is a myth of long ago; not a thing that could exist today. And naval officials like neat and understandable records—

Illustrated by Kolliker

LIKE a sounding whale plagued by hunters, the *U-213* lifted her fluked tail and plunged toward the bottom. Down, down she went, trailing a necklace of bubbles forced from her ballast tanks. Now a darker streamer was torn from her side by the rushing water and wafted to the surface. There it spread, glowing with myriad colors under the cold northern sun, to mark the descent of the steel leviathan.

In the bowels of the monster silence reigned, save for the intrusive rumbling of the waters as she clove through the depths. The pale lights made masks of the faces of the crew, who, braced in grotesque attitudes against the steep descent, waited in stolid patience for orders—or death. Amidships, in the cluttered control chamber, Korvettenkapitan Lothar Diedrich fixed his monocle in a dispassionate gaze on the crawling needles of the fathometer.

When the point quivered on "40" he barked an order and a square, bronzed giant beside him wrenched at the spokes of a wheel set into the steel bulkhead. The needle slowed in its course around the dial and the deck was level. The rumbling of the water died away to a faint murmur. Diedrich released his hold on the periscope standard and turned to his second in command.

"We fooled them," he remarked in a cold, brittle tone. "One would think they would get wise to that old oil trick. But the *dummkopf* will steam back to Kirkwall at full speed to brag that another raider has been destroyed. Here"—he caught a headphone set from an impassive sailor and held them out—"listen. Their propeller beat grows fainter already."

Oberleutnant Graf Gunther von Rothberg accepted the phones and clapped one to his ear. The rhythmic throbbing of the English destroyer's screws was barely audible, even though amplified by the sensitive audiophone.

"This calls for a toast," he grinned at the bearded commander.

"It will have to be *schnapps*, then," the other retorted. "The champagne we took from that Frenchman two weeks ago is all gone. Call the steward."

While the crew looked on woodenly, but none the less thirstily, the two Junkers, with the assistance of the engineer and gunnery officers, drank damnation to the enemy.

Meanwhile, the *U-213*, her motors stopped, hung in the black depths, three hundred feet below the surface and an equal distance from the oozy black bottom.

IT HAD BEEN a successful hunt for the Kraken. Five porpoises, a small whale and thousands of herring were digesting inside the great bag that was its stomach. With its eight

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The Kraken tightened angrily about this invader, confused by its hard, inedible shell.

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sucker-lined tentacles folded complacently over the pink mouth of the bag, and its two long feelers thrown out in the current, just in case something in the way of dessert came along, the Kraken floated comfortably at a depth of some twenty fathoms.

Then, without warning, the great bag was suddenly constricted. The whale shot from the pink mouth like a discharged torpedo, followed immediately by the remains of the porpoises and a dark cloud that had been a school of herring. The ten serpentine arms writhed as the deflated bag twisted around the calcareous slab that served the Kraken as a skeleton.

Scarcely had the Kraken resumed his natural shape when that terrible, invisible force seized it again. Four times in all was the monster subjected to this weird *squeeze*, and the experience left it momentarily helpless and not a little afraid.

Twelve centuries had passed since the Kraken was spawned in the cold North Sea, a miniature of its present self, not one tenth as large as the smallest sucker disk on its newest tentacle. It was ten since the growing cephalopod, even then a giant among its race, had learned to seize those strange fish that swam only on the surface and pick off the tiny but delectable parasites that cluttered their backs. Fully two centuries ago the Kraken, stung painfully by these same queer fish, had abandoned the surface of the sea and taken to the quiet depths.

Even here, the monster now remembered, it had not always been safe. This was not the first time it had suffered from that invisible but none the less potent *squeeze*. But the sea offered only two realms: the surface and the depths. The Kraken had been driven from one. It determined to fight for the other.

With a flash of its broad fins that, stretching along each side of its bag-like stomach, made that vast appendage serve also in lieu of a body, the Kraken surged forward. Its two long feeler tentacles probed the darkness ahead, searching for this new enemy.

DIEDRICH lowered his glass to receive the report of a stocky *bootsmannsmaat*. "No leaks, no plates strained, *Herr Kapitan*."

"Good," nodded the commander. "Not that I expected anything of the sort. Gentlemen, may trouble always avoid us by as wide a berth as the *Englander* depth bombs give us."

"Sinful," remarked von Rothberg. "Wasting all that money just to kill a few fish."

The others laughed and held out their glasses to the steward. But the amber liquor never reached them. Even as the man tilted the bottle, the *U-213* rolled heavily to port, then swung back in an arc that laid her on her beam ends. Men and gear were catapulted across the narrow chambers, and from the bow came a rumble and screams of agony. The gunnery officer was the first to extricate himself from the tangle in the control chamber.

"A torpedo is loose," he cried, clambering awkwardly over the maze of pipes, wires and valves that lined the submarine's sides. The next moment he was hurled into a corner where his head hit a pipe with a sickening crunch.

The ship rolled faster, in ever lengthening arcs, while the crew tumbled about helplessly. Cries of pain and alarm echoed through the white steel tunnel, punctuated with the metallic clamor of tools and gear gone wildly adrift.

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"Battle stations!" roared Diedrich, clawing to his feet. A rivulet of blood trickled down his face and disappeared into his golden beard, but the monocle still glittered in his right eye. "Secure all! Stand by to blow tanks!"

A warning siren cut through the clamor and men fought their way to their posts, where they clung desperately to anything that would afford a hand hold.

"Blow all tanks!"

Hissing and gurgling, the compressed air slowly forced the sea water out of the buoyancy tanks. Lightened, the *U-213* started to rise to the surface. But with her own increasing buoyancy and the lessening of the pressure, she rolled more and more violently. Her stern seemed held in a vise, but the bow threshed about wildly. The commander, eying the instruments, was frankly bewildered.

"Name of God, what is it?" cried von Rothberg.

Diedrich shook his head. The *U-213* was up to twenty fathoms and rising fast—but nowhere near as fast as she should. "Full ahead, both motors!" he barked.

Under the impetus of her twin screws, the *U-213* surged ahead. At once the violence of the rolling decreased, and the bow no longer whipped about like a charged wire.

"Up ship!" Diedrich commanded. Men sprang to the levers controlling the elevator planes and the submarine began to climb. Faster and faster moved the needle of the fathometer, until it read zero. The ship gave one final spurt and came down to an even keel with a bone-jarring crash.

"All clear on the surface," Diedrich muttered, revolving the periscope. "Surface battle stations! We'll see what was playing with us."

The hatch overhead clanged open and the commander, followed by his lieutenant and three seamen, two of whom carried an unmounted machine gun, climbed the steel ladder to the chariot bridge. While the seamen mounted the gun, the two officers scanned the choppy surface of the sea.

"Nothing!" growled von Rothberg. "Not a thing in sight. But what could have tossed us around? Submarine volcano eruption?"

"No," answered Diedrich. "Nothing like that. We'd have felt the heat. Did you notice, after the motors started, the ship hung for a moment, then leaped like a frightened hare? Something had hold of us."

The sea gave no answer. Except for half a dozen wheeling gulls, there was not another living thing in sight. Forward, a somewhat battered gun crew had the 105-millimeter rifle stripped for action and were looking grimly about for a target.

"Switch to the Diesels," Diedrich ordered. "No use running down our batteries." The humming of the electric motors ceased and the coughing of the surface engines took its place. Diedrich took the wheel and swung the *U-213* in a wide circle. "We were going almost due north when we came up," he commented. "We'll backtrack a little. Maybe we'll raise something."

IT WAS PERHAPS five minutes later that von Rothberg turned a puzzled face to his commander. "We seem to be slowing down," he said.

Diedrich turned from his search of the surface and shot a glance ahead. The bow wave was rapidly diminishing, and what little there still was could be accounted for by the rising wind and current. Aft

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there was a tremendous boil as the powerful screws bit into the solid water. The ship was beginning to vibrate.

"This is it," the commander said softly. "Look alive, now." His hand sought the engine-room telegraph and rang to "Stop." The vibration ceased and the ship rode easily.

"*Gott im himmel!*"

The cry was wrung from one of the gunners forward. He stood up to his knees in the green water, seemingly rooted to a spot from which his comrades had retreated. The man cried aloud again, then whipped out his knife and stabbed viciously at something close to his legs.

"She's going down by the bow," the lieutenant cried, starting forward. "The gun platform's awash."

He had scarcely cleared the high bridge when the gunner, still screaming, was borne across the deck and disappeared into the water off the port side. His mates stood by dumbly.

"Grab him!" shouted the officer. "Do something! *Schnell!*"

Then von Rothberg, too, halted dumbly. Creeping across the tapering deck of the submarine were six immense tentacles, each as thick as a hundred-year oak. Slowly, deliberately they moved, three rising from each side of the ship. As the tips met and passed, like nothing so much as a monstrous, living claw, the deck dipped under their weight and green water poured through the open forward hatch.

"The hatch!" roared Diedrich from the bridge. "Close it!"

The command was unnecessary. Willing hands appeared from below and the steel hatch clanged shut. A series of muffled rings followed as the dogs were locked home. A cry went up from the remaining gunners.

"*The Kraken! The Kraken!* We are lost!"

"Swing that rifle around," ordered the commander. "Train it on those damned tentacles where they clear the ship. Rapid fire, if you value your lives."

From Diedrich's side came the chatter of the machine gun. A line of holes appeared along the nearest tentacle. But the beast under the ship minded them as little as a bull minds the scratch of a thorn bush. The tentacle quivered slightly, but did not pause in its course across the deck.

The rifle spat flame, and as the roar of the explosion rocked the men on the bridge they saw one of the six mighty arms whip into the air and fall limply into the sea. A cheer went up from the gunners as they rammed home another round. Again the big rifle spoke, and again a severed tentacle slithered back into the green sea.

"*Ausgucken!*"

Diedrich screamed the warning, but, deafened by the reports of the big rifle, the gunners failed to hear it. Another second and it was too late. The Kraken's two feeler tentacles, five times as long as its eight regular arms, had risen from the sea and hung over the exulting gun crew, the spatulate tips undulating. Then, striking with the speed of vipers, they scooped up the five men and pulled them under the surface.

By now the great tentacles were seemingly endless loops thrown over the fore part of the slender hull. The immense weight of the monster, whose displacement exceeded that of the *U-213* herself, was steadily pulling the submarine under.

"Prepare to dive!" groaned Diedrich. The siren wailed in the bow-

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els of the ship as the survivors dropped down the ladder. The water was already lapping at the chariot bridge as the commander, with a last despairing look forward, descended and closed the hatch.

"We can't fight that monster," he told the lieutenant, who was regarding him questioningly. "Not now, anyway, while it's clinging to the ship."

"Perhaps it will shift forward," von Rothberg said hopefully. "In front of the tubes. And then—"

"Are you a fool?" snapped Diedrich. "Would you explode a torpedo under our very bows? We might as well seek the depth bombs of the English."

In its present position the submarine was absolutely helpless. Its bow, under the weight of the Kraken, was submerged, while its stern stood clear of the surface.

"Flood the forward tanks," snapped Diedrich. "We'll try a crash dive. Maybe we can shake that *teufel* off. Shades of the good Bishop Pontoppidan. He was not far wrong when he described the Kraken as being two kilometers across."

"You believe those superstitions, *Herr Kapitan?*" cried von Rothberg above the gurgling of the sea water.

"I believe my own eyes, *leutnant,*" the older man snapped back. "Did you recognize that monster? It is a cuttlefish, a cephalopod. But the *grosspapa* of them all. It must be hundreds of years old, if not a thousand. I'm afraid poor Heinkel, the gunner, was right. It *is* the Kraken."

"But the Kraken," insisted von Rothberg, "has not been reported in two hundred years. Be reasonable, *Herr Kapitan.* This is bad enough as it is."

"'Reported,' no. But how do you know the monster has not been *sighted?* How many North Sea fishermen could engage this beast and return home to tell of it? What chance would a smack, or a trawler, even, have? Only our steel plates have saved *us.*"

Von Rothberg would have protested further, but just then the U-boat's stern sank beneath the water and the screws took hold, driving the ship toward the bottom. Diedrich spun to his instruments, and signaled for the stern tanks to be flooded, to restore the ship's equilibrium when the Kraken had been shaken off.

As THE KRAKEN bored through the depths, anger seethed along the few nerve threads that served the monster as a brain. It was not so much the pain of being squeezed—for, with its limited nervous system, the Kraken did not feel pain easily—but the loss of its dinner. It had been many years since the Kraken had dined so well. Those odd fish that swam on the surface, and which, long ago, drove him to the depths, were gobbling up the best of the schools. The Kraken knew this, because it had occasionally caught and crushed such fish and found tons of herring inside.

But still, the Kraken was not a natural fighter. Not since it had passed its hundredth birthday had it found it necessary to fight for its life. Nor, with its vast bulk and infinitesimal brain, was it easily aroused. Twenty-odd years before—it might have been yesterday to the Kraken—that strange but powerful *squeeze* had seized it. Sometimes its pressure was violent, sometimes merely annoying. The Kraken had almost forgotten it when it was caught again in the diamond pat-

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terned quadruple explosion of the ash cans dumped on the *U-213*.

Had the Kraken found no enemy, the odds are the monster would have gone on, seeking another dinner. But the submerged U-boat lay in its path.

The instant the Kraken's feelers contacted the cold steel hull they recoiled. Cautiously the Kraken advanced, until its huge globular eyes were focused on the motionless ship. It looked like a whale, but the Kraken knew very well it wasn't. No whale, even asleep, would allow its natural enemy to approach so closely. Around, over and under the stranger the Kraken swam. Then, becoming bolder, the monster shot out its feelers and seized the fluked tail. Still there was no sign of life. The Kraken drifted up to the ship, wrapped its many working arms around the tapering hull, and squeezed.

But the stranger ignored the pressure—a pressure which would have reduced a sperm whale to a pulp. It merely rolled under the Kraken's weight. Then, without warning, it came to life. Water spurted from its sides and it struggled toward the surface. Grimly the Kraken held onto its prize until the sea boiled in its face and forced it away.

Nothing daunted, the monster followed the stranger to the surface, where it started to swim away. Now the Kraken knew what it was: one of the odd fish that were so depleting its food supply. If so, there should be titbits, even if the fish itself was as indigestible as others of its kind. Flicking its immense fins, the Kraken followed, came up under the other and seized it again just behind the head. This time it would not escape.

Patiently the sucker disks crawled up and over the steel hull, tightening the grip of the mighty tentacles. As the tips of the serpentine arms looped back under the hull, the Kraken noticed one of the titbits it sought stuck to a sucker disk.

A silent gulp, and Kanoniersmaat Rudolph Himmler had paved the way for his shipmates.

The sudden loss of two tentacles startled the Kraken, but only for a moment. Its appetite whetted by the remaining poor wretches scooped off the deck by his feelers, he renewed his efforts to subdue the big stranger. This time he was prepared for any sudden maneuver, and was not shaken off when the ship dove headlong toward the bottom.

Half an hour later the Kraken, swimming backward by expelling powerful jets of water from its gills, was towing the *U-213* to its subterranean den.

IN THE silent control chamber Korvettenkapitan Diedrich paced nervously, hands clasped behind his back and his bullet head thrust forward. Von Rothberg had found a seat and crouched over the *schnapps* bottle which, somehow, had remained unbroken. Forward in the torpedo room and aft in the engine room other men crouched, nursing pannikins of fiery rum issued by the commander's order.

"There is nothing we can do. Nothing," Diedrich muttered. "It is suicide to go on deck while that monster has hold of the ship. We can only wait until it swims away. Perhaps then we may get a shot at it."

"What do you think happened to the gun crew?" the other asked.

"I prefer not to think," Diedrich snapped. He glanced at the chronometer. "It is now half an hour since we cut the motors and let that demon fish tow us where it

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[illegible] other instruments and the telltale tape that recorded their passage. "Nor'nor'east," he muttered, "at three knots. If this keeps up till midnight, we'll be in the Bukke Fjord."

Von Rothberg said nothing. He was regarding the bottle glumly. It was empty.

Hour after hour Diedrich kept his weary vigil. The air grew steadily fouler. It would have prostrated any but a veteran *unterseeboot* sailor. Long before midnight the Kraken changed course and pointed almost due north, and Diedrich's hope that they might be rescued by one of the Norwegian gunboats based on Stavanger faded.

Then there was a scraping along the steel hull. It made a hellish clamor inside the ship and brought all hands to their feet. It stopped, then started again. Blows fell on the steel skin, and here and there a rivet started, sending a needle-thin stream shooting across the cluttered compartments.

A cry of alarm from the engine room turned Diedrich aft. "What's up?" he bellowed.

An oiler stumbled forward into the control chamber. "Both tail shafts snapped off, *Herr Kapitan*. Our propellers are gone. And water is coming through the packing boxes."

Diedrich glanced at the fathometer. It showed less than eight fathoms of water over them. A grating sound under his feet told him the ship was being dragged over the bottom.

"Blow all tanks!" he barked.

Von Rothberg came to life. "*Easy, Kapitan,*" he warned. "We're in a tunnel of some sort. A cave."

"I guess as much," the commander said. "It would be the monster's den. But we will have to risk hitting the roof or lose our keel, too."

Lightened, the *U-213* rode easier. There was less slamming and banging outside. But from the gyrations of the compass, it was evident they were following a twisting, turning course.

"Where are we?" von Rothberg wanted to know.

"Somewhere near, or under the Island of Karmo," Diedrich answered. "A little north of Skudeneshavn."

"Then we can call for help by radio."

"Yes," the commander conceded, "*if* we can't work ourselves out of this mess. I don't want the ship interned."

The keel grated along a pebbly bottom and the *U-213* came to rest. A check of the log tape told Diedrich the monster had towed them more than a hundred kilometers. Picking up the audiophone receiver, the commander listened intently. The faint swishing of the Kraken's long fins, which had haunted their passage, had ceased. He raised the periscope and looked around. It was pitch-black above.

"Rig a diver," he ordered, "and prepare the air lock. Equip him with an acetylene torch and a lamp."

A self-contained suit was dragged out of a locker and a young torpedo man reluctantly wriggled into it.

"Now listen, Meyer," the commander told him. "I don't want you to take any unnecessary risks. Stick close to the air lock until you are sure the monster isn't around. There isn't much water here. You can blow to the surface using the periscope as a guide. There's a portable radio attached to that suit. Keep in constant communication with us."

"*Jawohl.*"

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THE face plate of the helmet was closed and locked, and willing arms guided the diver to the air lock.

"He's outside now," reported von Rothberg from the radio desk. "He's going aft." There was silence for a while. A circle of pale faces ringed von Rothberg. "He's under the stern," the lieutenant repeated. "Both screws gone and rudder unhoused. Now he's going up along the deck."

The leaden footsteps of the diver outside rang solemnly over the heads of the men inside the submarine. Unconsciously they looked up.

"He's going up," von Rothberg resumed. "His head is above the surface now. He says we're in a cavern. Plenty of room on all sides and overhead. His light won't reach the— *Mein Gott!*"

Von Rothberg tore the headphones from his ears and looked up in horror. In the dead silence all could hear Meyer's muted screams:

"The Kraken!"

Recovering, the lieutenant replaced the headphones. "The monster has caught him," he told the white-faced, tense circle around him. "It's holding him high in the air."

"Tell the fool to use his torch, barked Diedrich.

"Use your torch on it, Meyer!" von Rothberg repeated. "Your torch, man!" He turned to Diedrich. "He's dropped it."

For a minute there was silence in the cold steel chamber. Then a shrill scream burst from the sensitive receivers. Involuntarily von Rothberg jerked them from his ears. In the tomblike quiet all could hear the doomed torpedo man's wail.

"It's swallowing me, *Herr Kapitan!* I am being devoured! Help! *Herr Kapitan! Herr Leutnant!* Help!"

The little circle broke up. The seamen and petty officers slumped to the cold deck and gave way to their emotions. Von Rothberg remained at the radio, the headphones clinging precariously to the back of his close-cropped head. Diedrich, his bearded face impassive and his arms folded across his chest, stood like a statue, the pale light glittering on his monocle. From time to time one of the others looked up at him hopefully.

Several minutes passed thus, then the headphones again stuttered. The lieutenant hastily shoved them back into place and listened intently. "Meyer's still alive," he reported. "He's in the monster's stomach. He still has his light."

Diedrich remained motionless. Not by a flicker of an eyelash did he betray emotion. The men glanced at him and took their cue. Except for the sibilant breathing enforced by the foul air, the silence remained unbroken.

"He says it is like a monstrous cavern," von Rothberg continued. "The walls are a yellowish-white . . . They sway back and forth . . . They are lined with long white tendrils, like snakes . . . He says the tendrils are reaching for him . . . He's clinging to the wall, trying to cut his way out . . . But it's hopeless . . . There's a yellowish liquid seeping from the tips of the tendrils . . . It is becoming foggy . . . A drop of the liquid fell on his hand and burned . . . He's afraid he will fall . . . There's a pool of the liquid at the bottom of the stomach."

"That liquid would be mainly hydrochloric acid," Diedrich cut in. The commander's voice was controlled and icy, but von Rothberg, looking up, saw that his forehead was beaded with perspiration. "A creature of that size, and lacking

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teeth, would necessarily secrete a powerful digestive juice. Meyer is doomed, but fortunately he still has his knife."

Von Rothberg hesitated a moment and licked his dry lips. Then he spoke into the transmitter in a low voice. "You are lost, Meyer," he said. "We cannot help you. But you can die like a human being. Use your knife."

The lieutenant listened with bowed head. "He won't do it," he told Diedrich. "It is against his religion to commit suicide."

"It is an order."

The lieutenant repeated this. "The captain's order is that you kill yourself, Meyer. Now." There was another brief period of silence, during which von Rothberg's lips formed the word, "Praying."

Diedrich watched him stonily, and when the other jerked convulsively, he reached out and removed the headphones, dropping them on the radio desk. "Let the men have some air from the tanks," he said. "Not too much. And try to raise the home station."

THE HISSING of the compressed air tanks acted as a tonic on the crew. They came to life, but remained sitting or lying on their bunks. Von Rothberg, forcing the echoes of the unfortunate Meyer's dying cry from his mind, changed the wave length and hammered hopefully at the key.

"Well?" demanded the commander, after half an hour of this.

"No luck," responded the glum lieutenant. "There's a warship nearby. English. She's jamming our messages."

Diedrich swore roundly.

"Shall I try to raise the *Englander?*" von Rothberg asked. "Maybe they can get us out of here."

Diedrich shook his head. "No," he spat. "I won't give them the satisfaction of knowing we have fallen victim to a *verdammt fisch*. Put a man on the audiophone. The Kraken will leave this den sometime. Then we will rise to the surface and look for a way out."

But it was two days before the Kraken left the cavern and swam through the water-filled tunnel to the open sea. During this time the crew of the *U-213* lay sprawled in a stupor, induced by liberal doses of veronal, laudanum and whatever other soporifics the medicine chest offered. The practical-minded Diedrich, having no immediate use for them, and knowing that quiescent men require less oxygen, had chosen this way of conserving their dwindling supply of compressed air.

Diedrich, von Rothberg, the engineer officer and the three senior petty officers, the only men remaining conscious, were sitting in the control chamber when the welcome swish of the monster's fins was heard on the audiophone. Diedrich immediately snatched the headphones from the radio man.

"It's going out, at last," he exulted. "The sounds are barely perceptible. But we'll wait till it's out of the tunnel."

It was a long wait for the impatient men. The tunnel, the commander had calculated from the telltale strips, was fully a mile long.

"All right now," he said finally. "Blow all tanks, easy."

Diedrich, as captain, opened the bridge hatch and was the first man outside. He sniffed cautiously. The air was musty and heavy with the odor of the sea and dead fish, but to men confined in a steel shell more

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than sixty hours, it was sweet. The remaining five climbed up after him and inhaled noisily.

"It will take that monster many hours, perhaps a full day, to feed," Diedrich said. "That will give us time to explore and, if necessary, prepare a defense. Try the searchlight, *leutnant*."

Von Rothberg swung the powerful beam in a complete circle. All around them was solid rock. There was no sign of the tunnel through which the *U-213* had been dragged.

"I was afraid of that," Diedrich said. "The tunnel mouth is under water. We'll have a devil of a time locating it. Search overhead."

The beam shot upward three hundred meters before it was reflected from the stone ceiling. Von Rothberg played it over the whole vast dome. There was no opening, no hint of one.

"There must be a vent somewhere," he told the commander. "This air is reasonably fresh."

"Take two men and the small boat and skirt the sides of this pool. You realize what it is, of course?"

"An ancient volcano?"

"Not exactly. Notice the folds in that rock. This stratum was forced up at sometime and has subsequently been excavated by the sea. You can see the marks of erosion. A general subsistence of the land carried the tunnel below sea level."

Several of the men below recovered consciousness and Diedrich turned them out. The rifle on the foredeck was cleaned and half a dozen rounds of high explosive shells were stacked beside it. The ship rode easily at anchor in the center of the pool. There was no place to moor her, and, anyway, Diedrich decided it would be safer to leave her where, if the Kraken should attack, she could not be slammed against anything harder than water.

"There's only one vent," von Rothberg reported on his return, "and it's entirely out of reach. Halfway to the top of the dome."

A groan went up from the others —with the exception of the iron commander. With the loss of her propellers the submarine was helpless, and their hopes had been based on finding a land exit from the cavern.

"We'll get out," Diedrich reassured them. "But first, we must kill this monster. We can do nothing while there's a danger that it will appear."

WATCHES were resumed and the *U-213*'s crew settled down to await the return of the enemy. Big as the Kraken was, it could not survive half a dozen high explosive shells. A measure of confidence returned to the crew, and the older men began to relate stories of the underseas service in which crews had escaped from dangers as great, almost, as their own.

Diedrich was right in assuming that the Kraken would be busy a full day accumulating a dinner. It was not until three o'clock of the following morning that the monster signaled his approach on the audiophone. The crew immediately leaped to surface battle stations.

"It's taking its damned time," von Rothberg, standing beside the commander on the chariot bridge, muttered. Nervously he played the powerful beam over the still surface of the water.

"Shut off that light," Diedrich ordered suddenly. "It'll be shy of it and the beam will blind us. I've

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got a Very pistol. It's bound to splash when it gets into this shallow water."

The light winked out and the ten men—five at the rifle and five on the bridge—waited in utter darkness. Then the water rippled musically and a tiny wave washed against the steel side of the submarine. There was a muffled explosion as Diedrich fired a magnesium flare straight at the domed ceiling. The shell burst and unnaturally white light flooded the cavern.

"There it is. A point off the starboard bow," shouted the lieutenant.

"Rapid fire!" Diedrich barked. He hung half over the steel rail, part of his keen brain taking in the grotesque monster threshing toward them, and the rest intent on another danger, almost as great, which he had foreseen but which he had to risk.

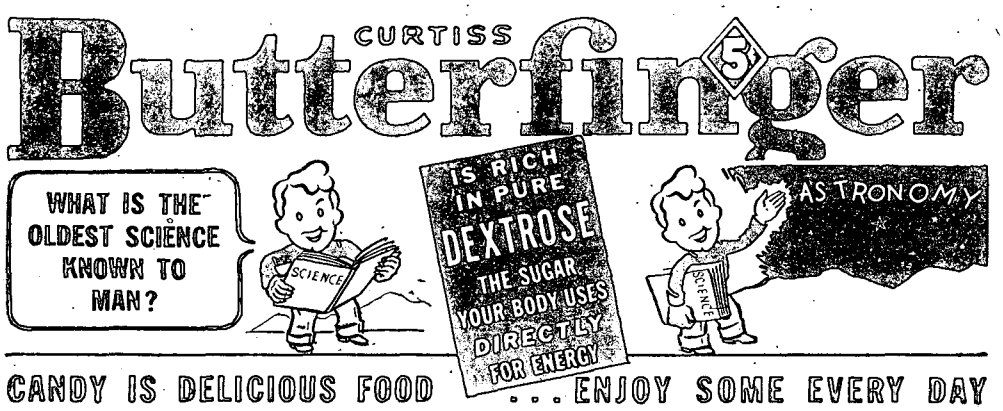
The rifle roared, and the reverberations deafened them. Von Rothberg fired two more flares to give the gunners light. Again and again the big rifle spoke, but in that inclosed space it sounded like a continuous rumbling.

"Lower! Lower!" Diedrich shouted. "Under water! Aim for the body!" But he could not hear the words himself. The gunners, laughing madly in the ghastly light, were scoring direct hits on the giant, writhing tentacles, the only part of the huge cephalopod visible.

Neither Diedrich nor the others heard the first rocks fall, but as he had half expected something of the sort, he was the first to interpret the sudden swells that set the ship to rolling. He glanced aside and saw a column of water rise high into the air not ten feet off their beam. Slapping von Rothberg on the back to attract his attention, Diedrich framed the words:

"Cease firing!"

The lieutenant nodded, ran down the ladder and started forward, where the gunners, with fresh ammunition passed up from below, had resumed their bombardment of the Kraken. He had not taken three steps when a huge section of the stone roof, dropping like a plummet, wiped gun and crew from sight. The fore part of the hull tore loose at his feet, the tough steel cracking like an eggshell. He went up to his waist in water, then the remainder of the ship, freed of the heavy bow but still weighted by the engines and batteries aft, rocked back, lifting the gaping wound clear of the surface. A sailor ran to his aid and dragged



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him back to the comparative security of the bridge.

"Unfortunate" Diedrich murmured. Only the lieutenant was in a position to read his lips.

Turning, von Rothberg glanced below. The stern was sinking, far deeper than the weight of the engines should have carried it. He slipped down the ladder. The floor of the control chamber stood at a forty-five-degree angle. Above him glowed the unholy light of the flare, where the whole forward end of the compartment lay open. Below him was the closed door leading to the engine room and the after compartments. Through the thick glass port set in it he saw water lapping. It was clear to him now. The stern had been stove in, and the shock of that mighty rock that tore off the bow dislodged the door. It had swung shut, the dogs falling into place automatically.

"*Kapitan!*" he shouted. Then, remembering the commander was as deaf as himself, he crawled back up the ladder and caught him by the leg. Diedrich looked down and nodded.

They two, and the three sailors on the bridge, were the sole survivors. And they would not survive long.

DIEDRICH came down the ladder, followed by the sailors. The latter were popeyed with fright and twitching with fear. Diedrich opened the closet containing the self-contained diving rigs. There were seven left. They were not regulation equipment for submarines of the *U-213's* class, but Diedrich had brought them in the hope of pulling off one of his many fantastic schemes—that of *carrying* a torpedo into an enemy naval base over the bottom. He now motioned for the others to don suits and got into one himself. Awkwardly, they dressed each other. Von Rothberg found that with the aid of the radio headphones, they could converse, although the others' eardrums must have ruptured like his own.

"The Kraken is not dead yet," Diedrich told them. "I saw it swimming around. But it has lost all ten tentacles now and is comparatively helpless. It is my idea that it will head for the open sea to escape us."

"And we will follow it through the tunnel?" von Rothberg asked.

Diedrich smiled coldly through the glass face plate. "You forget, *leutnant*, that the tunnel is more than half a kilometer long. And only Father Neptune knows what kind of a bottom it has. No, I intend that the Kraken, who towed us in here, should tow us out."

He picked a keen-edged harpoon from a locker, fitted it to a shaft and bent the end of a coil of light line to it. With the harpoon in his hand, he went back up the ladder. One of the sailors picked up the line and followed. Von Rothberg brought up the rear.

The commander gave them their instructions. "I'm going to harpoon this fish, and when it dives into the tunnel, you grab the line and go over. Inflate your suits so that you float clear of the bottom. Leutnant von Rothberg will go first, then you, Hirsh, you, Mueller, and you, Rothner. I will bring up the rear. I caution you, it will be a terrible passage, but whoever lets go of the line will be lost. At my order, cast off and blow to the surface. The tide is flowing now and will wash us ashore."

Diedrich took one last look at his ship, then flexed his arm. It was awkward, hurling a harpoon ham-

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pered by a heavy canvas rig, but he would have no time later to get into one. For fully half an hour they waited there while the Kraken, a mere vast bulk of flesh now, threshed the surface. Then the monster drifted close to the ship. The keen blade glittered in the beam of a flashlight which now provided the only illumination. Suddenly Diedrich's arm went back, then flashed forward, and the haft quivered in the mountainous gray body. The line hissed off the deck as the creature sounded. A minute and it whipped into the air, taut as a fiddle-string and stretching toward the far wall. Unceremoniously Diedrich flipped it into von Rothberg's hand and pushed him overboard. The others followed in quick succession, but there was barely two fathoms of line trailing behind the commander when he went over.

As Diedrich had warned, the trip was a nightmare. He was slammed from wall to wall until it took all his iron nerve and determination to hang on. Only the fact that he instinctively shoved his feet ahead of him, so the lead soles took the brunt of the shocks, kept the suit from being torn off his back. Then a comparatively soft object struck him and clung to him for a moment. Diedrich spun on his line like a deep-sea lead. The manila under his hands was rigid as an iron bar. A sudden terror overcame him. What if the line parted under the weight of this extra drag? He allowed his feet to swing back and kicked savagely. Then the object was whirled away by the current.

How long the passage took, Diedrich never knew. It might have been a minute, and it might have been an hour. But when he felt himself drawn downward, and the pressure increased, he knew they were free of the tunnel. He gave the order to let go and released the line himself. Like a balloon he shot toward the surface, until he remembered to jiggle the flutter valve with his chin and release the excess air in the suit. His ascent was slowed. Immediately he called the others. Only three voices answered.

"So *that* was what struck me in the tunnel," he thought. "Wonder which one?" But he did not ask. The others had their own troubles.

Eventually his helmet broke through the surface. He allowed the suit to fill until he was floating easily, but not head down. Overhead the stars twinkled and a bright moon shone. It was, Diedrich thought, the most glorious sight in the world.

SOMETIME later Diedrich felt himself being hauled out of the water. Strange hands twisted the globular helmet from his head and stripped the canvas suit from him. He looked up. A man, a sailor from his round cap, was bending over him. Two ribbons fluttered from the back of the cap, each a generous double-handbreadth.

"My men," Diedrich said. "Find them."

"*Jawohl, Herr Kapitan,*" the other answered. "We have already picked them up."

Diedrich closed his eyes for the first time in three full days.

When he awoke, he was lying in a bunk between clean sheets. He looked around. It was an officer's room. From the pitching and rolling of the vessel, he knew it was a destroyer. He closed his eyes again. Sometime later a steward entered with a bowl of steaming broth. Diedrich wriggled into a sitting position and wolfed it.

When the steward left, an officer

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took his place. He, too, wore the three gold stripes of a *korvettenkapitan*. He introduced himself as Hans von Wohl, commander of the destroyer, the *Baden*, on North Sea patrol. Diedrich gave his own name and ship.

"You were reported lost," von Wohl said. "The *Englander* that sank you caught the ship's number. And then you were two days overdue. What happened? We tried to question your three men, but they're all raving lunatics. They can only babble about that mythological Kraken. We've got them strapped to bunks."

"Was there an officer among them?" Diedrich asked.

"No. All seamen."

So it had been von Rothberg who had let go in the tunnel. Diedrich's heart sank. In his own way, he had liked the young Junker. He stole a side glance at von Wohl. The latter's square face was stony.

Diedrich turned away to think. There were only Hirsh, Mueller, and Rothner, besides himself, left alive out of a crew of fifty-one. And they were "raving lunatics." Suddenly Diedrich knew he could not tell the truth. Had von Rothberg, an officer and a nobleman, survived to substantiate his story, it might have been different.

"The admiralty will want a report," von Wohl prompted.

"Yes, of course," Diedrich said. "I'm recovered enough to sit up and write."

"We guessed that you crawled through a torpedo tube and blew to the surface," von Wohl went on, "but where did you get the suits?"

"Requisitioned them at Cuxhaven. I had an idea, but never got a chance to try it out. If you will allow me—"

"Of course. Of course. Consider this room as your own. It's the executive officer's. The steward will supply you with whatever you want."

Von Wohl left and Diedrich pulled himself out of the bunk. It was agony to move; he was black and blue from head to foot. But he forced himself into his uniform which, cleaned and pressed, was hanging in a locker. He found a pair of scissors and trimmed his beard. Then, with his monocle set firmly in his right eye, he surveyed himself.

"An undertaker couldn't lay me out better," he told himself.

He found paper and a pen on the desk. His report was brief. He described the sinking of the *U-213* by depth bombs at a point near where he had been picked up. All but the eight men in the control chamber were killed outright or drowned by the flooding of the forward and after compartments, he explained. After waiting nearly three days, and failing to raise another ship or the home station by radio, he said, he had conceived the idea of donning the suits, flooding the control chamber and blowing to the surface. Four of them, apparently, he went on, survived the ascent. The temporary insanity of the others he ascribed to the nerve-racking experience.

He read over the report. It was concise and logical. The admiralty would approve it and file it away with hundreds of others, and the matter would be ended.

Then, because the High Seas Fleet frowned on a captain who survived the loss of his ship and entire crew, he took the executive officer's pistol from the drawer and closed the incident.

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TRANSPARENT STUFF

by DOROTHY QUICK

Another tale of the Patchwork Quilt—a tale of ancient Babylon—

Illustrated by F. Kramer

THIN, transparent stuff! I examined it closely, trying to place its period in my mind. It was very sheer —woven by hand of what looked like linen with gold and silver threads through it, forming a pat-

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tern of fantastic flowers. It was delicately fine, unlike anything I had ever seen.

I had chosen it for my next adventure with the witch's quilt just because I had no way of identifying it. And one thing I was sure—no matter into what far world of the past it would take me, I would meet excitement of some kind or other. The witch who had made the quilt had liked to adventure in the past, to savor all that was strange and horrible in other people's lives. She had collected patches of the garments of various people and bound them together with magic, runelike embroidery until they formed a patchwork quilt. Whatever patch one put their hand on as they went to sleep, that experience was relived.

Aunt Amabel, who owned the quilt which I had discovered quite by accident, told me that after my first terrifying adventure. Sometimes I wondered if what I had been through was an actual experience or just a story invoked into being by the witch's skill. I had no way of finding out. I only knew that there was something very strange and fantastic about it, but also something very fascinating. The witch's world—or worlds—seemed more real to me than my own, and I felt that actually I only began to live when I put my hand on a patch and drifted off into sharing the existence of another being whose life was of more interest than my own drab one.

Before I had the quilt I had been conscious of a great lack in my life. Now I was like one addicted to a narcotic. I only became what I called really and truly alive under the quilt's influence.

I clutched the patch of transparent stuff tightly and turned out the light. Once more I was going to a world where things occurred; even if sometimes the happenings were almost unbearable.

The stuff felt very cool to my touch. As I lay there waiting I began to trace the pattern of the unreal flowers with my fingertip, and all at once I realized that I had gone beyond the limits of the patch and that the pattern was still there.

I opened my eyes and looked down. The thin, transparent stuff hung in stiff folds all about me. Through it I could see the gleaming of my skin and from the edges of the skirt my bare feet, thrust in sandals of gilt tied with soft leather, tapped impatiently against a tile floor.

The tiles, of a peculiar shade of greenish blue, were shiny. I could see my reflection in them, and gasped with amazement, for the face that looked back at me was my own face—the face of Alice Strand! Different, of course, for Alice Strand's eyes were not so elongated, nor so heavily outlined, nor were her brows so thick with black that it was an effort to lift the lids. I didn't, in my own existence, wear my hair wound in hundreds of tight ringlets that hung down to my shoulders. My figure was different, too, but there was no mistaking the features. They were my own.

Was I dreaming? Could it be that the other experiences had been dreams? I knew that wasn't so. Yet here I stood in a strange costume—a strange counterpart of myself.

I looked down again. The dress was very transparent and modestly revealing, yet beautiful, for the pattern was exquisite and the flowers were painted in vivid blues and reds. My arms were bare and the neck low cut, but around my neck was a necklace of turquoise and rubies. Turquoise and rubies linked with gold were wound around my wrists

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and ankles. Whoever I was, I must be highly placed to wear such jewels.

I looked around. I was in a small room; the walls were tiled, too, and the ceiling rose into a dome far above me. There was little furniture—a great thronelike chair behind me, a few stools set about the floor, a jasper table. There were arches along the wall hung with heavy curtains with odd geometric designs.

At this moment I became aware that my foot was tapping more rapidly and that I was growing impatient. I wished I could read more of the minds of those with whom I was so strangely linked. Even the thoughts of this person whom I had once actually been were unknown to me except as she thought them.

"To keep me waiting so!" flashed through her mind, and she clapped her little hands, heavily laden with rings, together.

Before the echo of the sound died away a curtain pulled aside. A tall, spare man entered. He was dressed in a fine pleated linen gown. It was girdled with a gold belt, and he wore a linen headdress held on with a golden band. He had thick black curls, too, and a narrow pointed beard. His face was sly, and his eyes cold, green and glistening like those of a snake.

"O Star of Light, I have been long, but your wishes are heavy—"

"Surely what I ask is simple. Only a glimpse into the future—of which you, Abeshu, are said to hold the keys." The voice issuing from my lips was musical and sweet.

Abeshu answered with asperity.

"Nay, princess, you have it wrong. I do hold keys, it is true, keys that open the doors into the chambers where the great Bel, who owns the Sun, and Marduk, who rules Heaven and Earth, and still others of the gods of Babylon hold their court. Yes, I possess these keys, and sometimes can unlock these doors, yet the risk is great—not only to me who open the way, but to those who tread the path."

Star drew herself up. "So I have an answer to my question. I am not afraid."

"Suppose the answer is death?"

"As Bel decrees." Star shrugged her delicate shoulders. "Sometimes death is better than life."

"Not to the Princess of Babylon, the only heir to Mir-bel, the king of kings—that princess whom all Babylon worships as though she were Ishtar, the goddess of love, herself—whose lightest word is law." Abeshu regarded Star with envy in his glance.

"Why do you not finish and tell all the truth? Star of Light, Princess of Babylon, only heir of Mir-bel, king of kings, whom all Babylon worships, whose lightest word is law—yet who will be given as though she were a bale of silken goods to the highest bidder, wed to a man not of her liking, but of that same King Mir-bel's choice. Name me those who sue for my hand and the great empire of Babylon which goes with it."

"There is Ditmah, the elder son of the brother of the king of kings."

"You yourself said 'elder,' Abeshu. In truth, Ditmah is almost as old as my father, for thou knowest my father went childless for many years."

"Ay, I know—yet Babylon remains unchanged if you wed Ditmah. Many hold that would be good," Abeshu muttered. "Then there is Khian, the Egyptian, whose age is nearer yours."

"We are of an age, but tell me,

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Abeshu, is that fat, drunken youth fit mate for me?"

The man's eyes took in the pure beauty of the girl standing before him. She was like one of the slender lilies that grew in the palace gardens. He thought of Khian as he had seen him at the feast last night, full of wine and playing with a slave girl's hair.

"No, Star, yet Egypt joined to Babylon is one war less. But if you care not for these two, there is Temu."

"Whose country is the East, and though he may be a great king, I say that he is evil. Nay, more; I have heard that he consorts with demons and has a familiar. The Babylonians are the greatest wizards in the world. You, Abeshu, know all their arts, but Temu can better you, I think, though his ways are darker. Would you give me to that crafty, evil man if you were Mirbel?"

"Not for your soul's sake, Star of Light. But the King of the East is a maggot that gnaws at Babylon's far armies. Were you Temu's wife, the gnawing would cease."

"Am I, the Princess of Babylon, to be a stop to this maggot? Not if I die for it. Name me more suitors, Abeshu."

"The list is long, Star, but I think none others count but these three."

Star bent her head and pulled a tiny blue glazed bottle from her belt to catch her tears.

"You have spoken. Come, Abeshu, lead me to the temple. Let me ask the gods what hope there is for me, who'd not be made a pawn of state."

Abeshu sighed. "You are willful, Star. It is dangerous to invoke the gods on trivial matters."

Now Star's eyes flashed and her little foot began its tattoo again.

"How is my life trivial? Know, Abeshu, it hangs upon the question."

Drawing himself up, Abeshu shook his head.

"Perhaps even your life is but a whisper in the song of gods. Still, I am not the arbiter. Come, Star of Light, Princess of Babylon." He held aside a curtain, and Star passed through.

Star, her heartbeats quickened a little, followed Abeshu through room after room. Finally they went down a long corridor cut out of stone. In it, at intervals, were narrow, windowlike notches. Once Star looked through into a vast temple which had an effigy of a winged bull with a man's head before whom people worshiped. As they went along, Star could smell incense and hear singing. The sounds and odors ceased as the passage narrowed and slanted downward.

"We near the secret sanctuary. Turn back now, O Star, if you have any fear," Abeshu said.

"Lead on; I follow." This princess was bold!

Abeshu stopped. "Know, Star, before we enter this chamber, that you can question but one of the immortals. Choose you which one, and quickly, for the hour grows near when the summons must go forth."

"Who should I call but Ishtar, goddess of love?"

"So be it," Abeshu answered. "Now follow me and speak nothing unless bidden, princess."

He pressed the wall and what looked like solid stone revolved. Abeshu and Star stepped through the opening, and the stone clanged shut. They were in a little place cut from stone. The ventilation was good, and an oil lamp burned. Abeshu pressed the far wall, and the same thing happened again.

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Star and Abeshu entered a large stone chamber. There were great pillars of stone and many carvings of winged bulls with faces of men. There was an altar, and behind it, where a representation of a god should have been, a great empty chair of black marble seemed to dominate the room. There was something about that empty chair and its portent that struck terror to Star's heart. She wanted to run away from that silent room. But she stood still, shaping a little prayer of her own making in her thoughts to Bel and Ishtar.

Abeshu busied himself drawing a large circle inside of a double pentagon. Then he drew Star into the center of it.

"Unless you wish to meet Bel before your time, move not out of the circle, no matter what happens."

Then he threw some incense in two bowls that stood on either side of the altar and quickly took his place beside Star inside the circle. He began to chant slowly. The incense sent up great swirls of smoke obscuring the empty throne.

Over and beyond Abeshu's droning voice there suddenly came a whispering and a whirring noise as though hundreds of invisible wings were sloughing the air. Star became numb with the fear of the un-understandable, which at some time in life is known by everyone.

Then Abeshu spoke the word of power.

THAT INSTANT the whispering and the sighing of the air stopped and a force swept through the room that was devastating. Abeshu crouched low, his forehead touching the ground.

Star, who had been standing erect, felt herself catapulted to the floor, and for a minute she lost her senses. When she came to she looked up. The clouds of incense had been blown away.

The chair behind the altar was no longer empty.

In it sat a being so radiant, so majestic that Star could not look long at that luminous beauty. The goddess—for such a being could be naught else—regarded her steadily, and it seemed to Star as though that gaze stripped her soul bare, and there was nothing of her or her secret thoughts that the radiant being did not know.

Then the goddess spoke in a slow, measured voice that had no feeling in it but was like the clear, crystal chiming of a bell.

"Well, daughter, you have dared summon me from my own halls. Tell me why, for surely your need is great that you need a goddess to succor you."

Though she was trembling, Star answered, "Mother Ishtar, you whom I worship, know well why I have sent for you."

"Perchance. Yet, put your question, daughter."

"Many suitors come for me, and I would have none of them, I, who am your servant. Must I wed one of them, O mother? I, your daughter, pray to you for your own gift—love."

"Are you willing to pay the price, daughter—knowing only that there is a price, not what it may be?"

"Yes." Star barely whispered the word, yet the being on the throne heard, and for the first time smiled.

"All women who love, pay, daughter. Fear not, for though it may take centuries and many lives, yet in the end I tell you love triumphs over all—even me, from whom it comes. Well, you have sent for me and I will answer your question and give you a gift. To the question, must

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you wed one of the many suitors, I answer—no. You shall marry him whom your heart treasures, for the gift I give you is the gift of love, not only for a little moment, but for eternity. Remember, daughter, when you pay the price that you pay not for a little hour, but for forever."

The being lifted her hand and held it toward Star. Her lips curved once more, and then she turned to Abeshu.

"Though you have asked nothing for yourself, Abeshu, I will answer your unspoken question. Things shall be as you wish them, though not quite yet. Now trouble me no more with prayers, Abeshu."

"I give thanks," Abeshu muttered. "I hear and I obey."

Suddenly a strange, unearthly music swelled through the chamber, so sweet, so high-pitched that it was almost unbearable. Star held her hands against her ears and shut her eyes. When she opened them the presence on the throne was gone. The room was still.

"Are you happy now, O Star?" Abeshu asked dryly.

Star stumbled to her feet. "Yes, for the goddess promised me love for all time, Abeshu."

"Love at a price!"

"I care not."

"Well, remember that saying when you come to pay, princess," the man said. "Now we must go back. Your woman, Rima, will be full of fear."

Later, back in the tiled room again, Star gave her hand to Abeshu.

"I thank you, for you have served me well. Name your own reward."

For a few minutes Abeshu stood silently. Then he spoke: "I crave only to be your counselor. It comes upon me, perhaps because the wisdom of the goddess has touched me, that you may need my counsel."

"So be it. Now I remember that the goddess promised you something, too. What, Abeshu?"

"She said things would be as I wished them in time, princess—a matter of policy in the temple. There is one who wishes me ill. I rejoice that I shall triumph, even if it is not quite yet—"

"I think you do not tell me all, Abeshu. But let it rest. I will be glad of your counsel, and in the meantime, for your pains, take this —" Star drew a ruby that was big and red as a cherry from her finger and threw it to Abeshu. She did not see the look he flashed at her as he picked up the stone from the floor where it had fallen. She was thinking of the goddess' promise. But I saw, and I knew that Abeshu was an enemy to the Princess of Babylon, and that—even while he thanked her for her munificence—he hated her with all the force of his crafty soul.

ON HER WAY back to the palace, Star lay in her silken litter, propped up by scented pillows, with Rima, her woman, at her side. The litter itself, on poles of gold, was carried by twenty men. It was large and commodious, and, as it moved along, people everywhere made way for the daughter of the king and bent down before her in loving reverence. It was easy to read the adoration for their princess in the peoples' eyes.

The guardians of the litter, who rode before and behind it on snow-white horses, guided the men toward the hanging gardens, for they knew the princess loved the beauty of that which was held to be one of the wonders of the world.

The hanging gardens of Babylon! In truth, they were so lovely that they beggared description, for in them was gathered all the color the

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rainbow of the garden possessed, and every known plant and flower flourished in tropical splendor.

Star drank in the scented air as she was carried along. Once when Rima started to speak she lifted her hand. "No, Rima, this is too beautiful to mar with words." And they proceeded in silence.

Suddenly that silence was broken by a cry. "Help, help!" A young boy ran toward them. He stopped short when he saw the white horses of the guard and the litter of the princess. The chief of the guard motioned him aside. He moved as he was bidden. When the litter came near to him Star noticed his lip trembled and there was blood on his cheek and on the single garment that he wore.

She clapped her hands three times, the signal that told her bearers to halt.

"Bring the boy to me," she commanded.

"Not here!" Rima protested.

"Here—put down the steps."

Again she was obeyed. The captain of the guard, an elderly man who had been about Star since her babyhood, stepped forward.

"Let me question him, princess, if such be your will."

"Nay, bring him here, Gittair."

The boy was too frightened to speak at first, but Star calmed him and asked what was wrong.

Finally he answered. "It is my friend—he who saved my mother's life when the horse would have trampled her—and now a mob besets him, for they say he hurt the horse of Prince Khian when he pulled it away from my mother. The prince's men are trying to kill him for revenge. Prince Khian has many horses; why should he care for one that was only a wild beast?"

"Why, indeed, and why should the Prince of Egypt take judgment in his own hands? Rescue that man for me, Gittair." Star was imperious.

Gittair sent half of his guard with the boy, back to the place from which they could now hear sounds of conflict emanating. After a little those sounds died away and the guard returned. There were fewer of them, and in their midst walked the boy, with a stranger beside him. The stranger was tall and slim, yet with strong muscles that showed plainly under his bronzed skin. The white garment that he wore had been torn badly, so that the upper part of his body was bare. His face was finely chiseled and framed by silky black hair which made his great eyes seem all the darker. He had a straight nose and a mouth that made Star's heart leap as she looked at it.

"Truly Ishtar keeps her promise well," she said to Rima. "In this moment love has been born in my heart."

The woman moaned. "Pray Bel it be not some slave."

"Nay, give thanks to my mother Ishtar," Star whispered, and for a moment it seemed to her there was a strain of the sweet music she had heard in the sanctuary.

Now the stranger was near to her, and Star leaned forward. Their eyes met, and Star knew with that first glance that she had found her fate.

"Down—" growled Gittair.

The boy's head touched the grass, but the stranger stayed erect.

"I am grateful for the help, great one—my need was sore."

"How are you called?"

"Belzar."

"Are you of Babylon?"

"Nay, I am Egyptian by birth,

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lady, but my mother was from Babylon."

"What is your trade?"

"I sell my sword, lady, to those who pay well. I came here with Prince Khian, but, as I liked not his service, left it these two days past. Which, perhaps, is why the prince's guards, who once called me comrade, were angrier than need be."

Gittair stirred restlessly at Star's long questioning, and Rima kept whispering they should hurry to the palace.

Star ignored them. "Since you are not engaged, will you sell your sword to me?" she asked.

A flame leaped from Belzar's eyes to hers. "Gladly, lady, and as thanks for my rescue—a piece of news of great import to you and Babylon."

"Then follow us. Gittair, see that he is made one of my own personal guards. I will talk with you again, Belzar—soon; for I would hear your news, and more of Egypt and that Prince Khian whom you served."

Star smiled at Belzar and gave the signal for the litter to start on its way. In her heart there was a singing music as beautiful as Ishtar's own. For close beside the litter walked Belzar.

She leaned toward him. His head was on a level with hers as she lay propped up by pillows.

"Tell me your news now, Belzar."

"These slaves?" He gestured toward the bearers.

"Are deaf mutes. Speak on. Rima, turn your head away."

"Lady, your beauty is as that of the stars that shine in the heavens."

Star laughed. "So am I called—Star of Light."

"Whose rays have found my heart."

"Men have been killed for saying less than that. You are bold, Belzar."

"Your eyes gave me courage."

"You are quick at reading. Well, I bid you speak your heart."

"I love you."

Star caught his words to her heart and treasured them there for eternity.

Eternity! I, Alice Strand, looked long at Belzar's face, for something told me I should some day find its counterpart in my own life.

Star answered simply. "And I love you. Know, Belzar, that this very day the Goddess Ishtar promised I should find love and be my beloved's."

As their eyes caressed, Belzar said, "I give thanks, yet I would that Isis had spoken."

"Perhaps your goddess is the same as mine, Belzar, only in Egypt Ishtar takes a different name."

"You have uttered what may be a great truth. But, lady, how can we claim the promise of the goddess?"

A shadow clouded Star's face. "I know not yet, but I am sure Ishtar will find the way." At that moment she remembered Ishtar had talked of a price. But she thrust the thought from her at the sound of Belzar's voice.

"Listen, lady, to the news I spoke of. Khian plans to abduct you—tomorrow night. Your guards are bribed, except Gittair. Khian knew better than to approach him. Khian plans to take you to his camp. Once he has made you his he knows the king of kings will see you wed—and Egypt is safe from Babylon. So Khian surely wins against the other suitors."

"My father shall hear of this." Star's foot tapped angrily. "We will go to him at once. See, we are nearing the palace. Tell me quickly, Belzar, what is your rank?"

"I should be great in Egypt, lady,

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if the old strain still held Egypt's throne. But under the reign of the Shepherds we have come to naught."

"Yet your blood is good?"

"Ay, lady, but my State is not enough for Babylon's heir—"

"The goddess promised—yet she spoke of a price." Star held her breath now she had said the words.

"So that I hold you in my arms, I'd give my life—"

"And so would I," Star answered. It seemed to her the music of Ishtar swelled loudly for a moment, then it died away and she heard it no more.

AN HOUR LATER Star, Gittair and Belzar stood before the king of kings. Mir-bel, ruler of Babylon, was a frail man, and even the light linen headdress of royalty crowned with gold seemed too heavy for him to bear. Yet he sat majestically and held the ivory, gold-tipped scepter as one born to command.

"The charge you make is a grave one," he said to Belzar, "if it be true."

"Tomorrow night will prove its truth, O mighty one."

"If so, I grant lands and rank to you who will have saved the princess. Now listen. Let no suspicion of this leak abroad. Gittair, change not your men, but for every man of the princess' guard, three of mine shall stay hidden. We will catch them at their own game. Belzar must remain unseen for the present lest Khian suspect he has told. Can you see to that, Gittair?"

Star spoke. "I can, father, if it please you. My woman, Rima, could keep him in the secret room of my tower."

"Nay, child, Gittair will see to him."

"Can I not help guard the princess when they come?" Belzar spoke boldly.

Mir-bel smiled. "Youth ever wants to fight. Put him with my guards that night, Gittair. Now go."

Star kissed her father's hand dutifully. Mir-bel meant little to her. She saw him rarely—mostly on state occasions—and regarded him with awe rather than affection.

"May the king live forever!" cried Gittair, and Belzar echoed him.

The two men backed out of the room, but Star walked with her head held high.

THE NEXT NIGHT she prepared for bed as usual. She spent a long time in her heated marble bath, enjoying the fragrance of the scented waters. She sat quiet, while Rima brushed her hair, and, even when the woman had gone, lay quite still, as though she were asleep, without a sign of the excitement she felt. She knew that all around the room, hidden behind the hangings, were her father's men, and that Belzar was with them, watching her lying on her great silk-embroidered bed. And her heart beat faster as she sent her thoughts to him.

The last rays of the moon had vanished. It was the hour between night and morning. Suddenly she heard a stealthy step, then another and another.

A great mass of soft material enveloped her. It was wrapped swiftly about her, stifling any cry she might make, and she was lifted up in strong arms. This had been well planned. Even now they might get away with her in the dark—they were so silent. Suppose her father's guards had not heard, or Belzar—

Just then a shout told her the guard was alert. She could see even through the material a sudden blaze of light and hear the sound of fighting.

The man who was carrying her

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did not put her down, but went on running as fast as he could until she could hardly hear the sound of the fray. She knew the man must be making for the entrance to the garden, and she was terribly afraid. She tried to scream, but the material stifled her. Then she heard Belzar's voice, sharply commanding: "Put down the princess or I'll have your life!"

The man who held her answered, "She is my shield. I am taking her with me to Khian, traitor. To stop me you must kill her." Star knew the man was holding her and backing toward the door.

"Not so—my arm still has skill!" Star heard a hissing noise, a groan, felt the arms about her relax their hold. At the same moment other arms caught her, and a hand began untangling the material from her. There was the sound of a body falling.

When she was freed from the material she looked up into Belzar's eyes. She was in his arms. "My love," she whispered.

The sound of people coming along the corridor from her room forced their lips apart. Belzar put Star's feet on the ground, releasing his hold.

Nearby lay a large, swarthy man with a dagger through his eye.

"I threw upward to pierce his brain. An old trick," Belzar said.

"Yet one that saved my life. See, Gittair," Star called to the captain of the guard who approached, "the miracle Belzar has done!" Quickly she told the tale, and then, while they were still exclaiming in wonder, slipped back into her chamber, where she found Rima and her other women waiting.

LATE the next day Abeshu asked for an audience. Star received him on the terrace outside the portion of the palace that was her own. She sat in a golden chair under a canopy that was almost as large as a room. Beyond her stretched gardens of exquisite beauty.

Abeshu bowed and Star extended her hand to him. He touched his forehead with it.

"I bear a message."

"Speak, Abeshu." Star motioned him to a chair. He made himself comfortable.

"Much has happened since we met."

"Is that your message?"

"Nay. The message is from your father, Mir-bel, king of kings, who bids you to a feast tomorrow night. He tells me to whisper in your ear to make yourself beautiful, for it is your betrothal feast."

"So soon? O Ishtar, help me now!"

"Have faith, daughter."

"Who will the king give me to? Answer me, Abeshu, who know all things. Tell me, too, how I can have faith when the hour is so close and there is no way that I can see."

"Because the goddess told you you should have your love, princess, and I, Abeshu, have come to help you as the goddess planned."

"I heard naught of any plans, and yet I would be glad of help." Star's voice softened.

"Then listen." Abeshu leaned nearer. "Mir-bel has decided to keep Babylon to itself. In order to avoid dissension after his death, he will wed you to Ditmah, his brother's son, heir after you."

"Now I would rather die."

"So you said to me before, and I am sure you mean it—still more, now that the goddess has granted part of your prayers."

"You know!"

"When a princess kisses it means

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she loves. Hate me not, Star, because I was hidden in the little passageway and saw. Well, for that deed—I mean rescuing you, not the kiss, though in truth that was mighty,"—he hurried on to avoid Star's anger—"as I said, for rescuing you, Belzar has been made a noble of Babylon and given command under Gittair of your guard. So your are one step bettered."

"One step is little with a whole flight to climb."

"But a beginning. At least Belzar is not unknown. He has a place at court. Listen, princess; at the feast, wine flows freely. Even the great king of kings, to whom all the world bows, is mellowed by the juice of the grape, and once he has promised anything, and *the one to whom he gives that promise touches his scepter, that decree cannot be altered or changed.*"

"I never thought of that. Of a truth, Abeshu, you are wise." Star's lips curved as she thought of Belzar.

She didn't see the crafty eyes of the man narrow, or notice the smile of triumph on his face. But they were there, and I, Alice, saw them and was afraid. I didn't want ill to come to this ancient self of mine. She was too lovely, too sweet, too wrapped up in her love to cope with the evil in Abeshu's mind. For, just as surely as I saw the great ruby glistening on Star's fingers, I saw the evil of that man. Still, I could not warn Star:

Perhaps, though, she felt some of my misgiving. At any rate, she turned to him.

"Why do you help me, Abeshu, against my father, whose counselor you are?"

"The king of kings grows old. I must look to myself, and you have promised me a place in your counsel, Star of Light." He bowed.

"You will not find me ungrateful. Tell me how best I may manage."

"That you must leave to your woman's wits, but remember they are sharpened by love. Mine shall be the task to see that the cup, the great gold cup of the king of kings, is well filled."

"Suppose the scheme fails—what then?"

"Well, Ditmah is not young, and I have secrets. But the scheme will not fail. Once you have the king's word and touch the scepter, not even Bel himself can keep you and your love apart. The king of kings suspects nothing, and, as a further help, I will tell him I sounded you out and you were well pleased with his choice."

"What reward can I give you?"

"You have already promised—"

"That is in the future. I mean for the present."

The man thought a moment. "Another ruby, princess, for a pair can be used for earrings."

Star detached a ruby, the largest, from her necklace.

"A poor present, but an earnest that there shall be more. And I will not ask you who will wear them."

Abeshu took the ruby and knelt before Star. "Have I your leave to go?"

Star inclined her head. She was so busy with her own thoughts that she did not see him slip silently away.

THE GREAT HALL of the palace where Mir-bel held his feast was full of people when Star, attended by Rima and Gittair, took her place at the banquet table.

One third of the hall, which was roofless, had awnings stretched over its length. Below the awning was the table of the king of kings set high upon a dais. Below were more

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tables graded in height for the less important guests, and many level with the floor for the guards, eunuchs and followers of the visitors.

Belzar, with his newly granted rank of noble of Babylon, was at a table near enough so Star could see his face.

Star had never looked more beautiful. Her hair was outspread and sprinkled with gems. She wore a diamond-studded gown and looked like the Star for which she was called. She sat at the right of Mir-bel, Temu at his left. Ditmah was at one end of the table, Khian at the other, for the Egyptian prince had claimed he knew nothing of the plot and had acquiesced in the killing of his men, saying they deserved death for plotting behind his back. There were others at Mir-bel's table, ladies of his household and the court, more of Star's suitors, some whose rank was not so great at the lesser tables. Abeshu sat three removed from the king and was keeping his promise by seeing the king of kings' cup was well filled and often. As the feast went on, Mir-bel's color heightened and Star knew that he was growing mellow as Abeshu had predicted.

Finally Abeshu looked at Star. "The time is coming," he signaled with his eyes. He rose, taking a bottle from the chamberlain with the tall pointed hat who stood beside him, walked to the king of kings and prostrated himself to the ground. Mir-bel stretched out his scepter and Abeshu rose.

"May the king live forever!" he exclaimed, as was customary. "Here I have an old and wondrous wine which in the temple is used only for great celebrations. I have brought it for you to drink tonight, for this hour henceforth will be great in Babylon."

He spoke to Mir-bel, but he smiled at Star.

The king of kings lifted his gold cup, so richly carved it looked like a chalice. He tilted it and poured its contents on the table.

"A libation for the gods!" he cried. "Now give me your wine, but taste it first, Abeshu, so we know it's safe."

Abeshu broke the slender neck of the bottle, holding it high, let a little trickle down his throat and swallowed. Then, at a nod from Mir-bel, he filled the gold cup.

The king of kings lifted it toward Star and drained its contents. As he set the cup down he said, "Truly, Abeshu, that wine is potent. Already I feel fire running through my veins."

Abeshu slipped back of Mir-bel's chair, standing well toward the left, where he could look at Star.

"Fire of the gods!" he exclaimed.

Mir-bel rose. "I have asked you all here tonight because it is time that my heir, Star of Light, Princess of Babylon, is wed—for her own sake and that of Babylon. So now I choose her husband."

Abeshu nodded to Star.

Star knew it was the moment for her to speak, and her heart throbbed so loudly it was like a hammer in a throat.

"Mother Ishtar, help me now," she prayed, and she heard a soft strain of the music she had heard in the sanctuary and rose with newfound courage.

"O my father, I, Star, beg a boon of you."

Mir-bel turned and smiled benignly. "Speak on, daughter."

"I beg that I myself shall choose my mate." Very regal she looked as she stood there; the iridescent glow of hundreds of diamonds shining from her robes and hair, com-

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bined with her beauty, made her seem like an illustrious being clothed in light. There was a murmur of admiration throughout the hall.

Mir-bel looked at her proudly. "You have been brought up to be a queen, my daughter, and you have learned your lesson well. You *are* a queen and could not choose other than wisely. I give you leave to choose your husband here and now." He stretched out the scepter, and Star touched it.

Then a new wisdom came to her. She would make things doubly safe.

"One further boon. That when I have chosen, I and my husband may live in the small palace by Ishtar's temple, for I would not be parted from my father—or my people—"

Star looked at Ditmah, who stirred in his seat. He was a handsome man, elderly, but still showing race and breeding in his face.

Mir-bel nodded. "As you have spoken so shall it be." Once more the scepter was extended and touched. Then Mir-bel said firmly, "And now, Star of Light, name your mate."

He sat down upon his golden chair. There was silence in the mammoth hall. Every eye was turned upon Star. But out of that whole multitude, Star saw only Belzar's face, white under its tan, staring at her.

She smiled at him, and then her voice rang out clear and sweet as the chiming of a silver bell.

"Arise, Belzar, high-born Egyptian, noble of Babylon, chosen husband of Star of Light!"

THE SURPRISE the people felt shivered through the place. Mir-bel looked at Star as though what he had heard was incredible, while his hand clenched angrily. In Abeshu's face was admiration and elation, in Ditmah's relief, while Khian, Temu, and the other suitors were surprised as well as disappointed.

Only in Belzar's face was joy intensified a hundredfold as he stumbled to his feet and made his way to Star.

The people were still spellbound with amazement as he leaped across the table to Star's side. He clasped her hand in his, and happiness rippled over them like little waves from a sea of bliss.

At the sight of them standing together, rage engulfed Mir-bel, anger such as he had never felt before. He turned to Abeshu.

"Untie me this knot, counselor," he commanded.

Abeshu leaned over and whispered in the ear of the king of kings.

Star, in her youth and happiness, turned to Mir-bel. "You have spoken, O my father. Your decree is unalterable, and I have touched your scepter. As you gave me permission to do, I have chosen my husband, and you promised we might dwell in the same palace by Ishtar's temple." Very sure of herself, now she had gained her love, was Star, and her face was more radiant than her jewels.

"As I decreed, so it shall be," Mir-bel's voice rang through the hall, "though you have chosen more like a slave girl than a queen. You shall wed Belzar, high-born of Egypt," he sneered, "who for a short while has been a noble of Babylon. You shall be wed, princess, as befits your rank. Your lover shall be raised high for the week the ceremony and rejoicings last. Then you two shall go to live in the Palace close by Ishtar's temple. Fear not, I shall keep my word. Nay, I even strengthen it, for this is my decree, which none can alter. You and your husband *shall*

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live in the palace. There shall be a room made ready for you in its walls and, living, you shall be placed there and the walls closed so that you may dwell there eternally."

Now through the room there was a wave of horror at this sentence of living death. Some even were moved to protest, but Mir-bel waved his scepter and they quieted.

"Ditmah henceforth is heir of Babylon. Let my words be written down," he said; then, leaning heavily on Abeshu's arm, he left the hall, old before his time.

STAR saw nothing that went on, not Ditmah's pride nor the courtiers fawning on him, not the sympathy nor compassion in other more kindly eyes, for she looked only at Belzar, who smiled.

"Your goddess said that there would be a price, and truly it is not too much to pay—for a week of happiness.

"I had thought that we were safe, that I had secured our future. But Abeshu betrayed me, and now I have only brought you to a horrible death."

"Not horrible, for we will be together, and did not your goddess promise that once the price was paid—"

"—that our love was safe forever. Yes, Belzar, not only for this life, but all lives to come."

"Then I count the price a small one." There was nobility in his voice, in his look.

Abeshu's voice broke in upon them, sounding loudly in the great place from which all the people had fled.

"The king of kings sent me to guide Belzar to quarters befitting the affianced of the princess. He said your marriage will take place tomorrow. He is anxious for the week of festival to begin, so I can the sooner escort you to your new home."

"Traitor! I wonder you dare address me." Star spoke royally.

"Nay, princess, call me not traitor. You were traitor to Babylon when you plotted against her. Princesses are but pawns in a royal game, and you stepped out of your place. You went against your race, your breeding and your country. You put self first, who should have abased it."

Now Star hung her head, for there was truth in Abeshu's words.

"Still," she said, "you might have saved us from such a terrible death, for I know well you showed my father where to walk."

"Yes, Star. But I would not have had you done your duty. Ditmah's wife is my sister's child, and he had no desire to wed you and set you over her whom he truly loves. Nor did he desire to lose Babylon. Yet I would have worked for you had you been firm, but I was glad when you were willful—"

Star laughed, and her laughter sounded more like a sob.

Belzar put his arm around her. "Peace, Star. This man but does the work of the gods."

"Thank you"—Abeshu shot Belzar a kindly glance—"and for your comfort, these." He drew two gold lockets from his belt. "They contain a tasteless powder. If you swallow it when you enter the chamber in the wall, by the time the last stone is in place you will be with the gods painlessly and quickly."

"My gratitude is yours." Belzar took the locket.

"And mine." Star reached out for the other. "I had dreaded the death. Now there is naught to fear—only a week of happiness together." She

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leaned close to Belzar. "Thank you, Abeshu."

"Now follow me," he said, and Star and Belzar walked behind him.

THE GORGEOUS, near-barbaric Eastern ceremony, a full week of celebration, passed as swiftly as a memory. A week in which two must force what joy their lives should hold. For on the morning of the eighth day Abeshu came to Star's quarters, which she now shared with Belzar.

Star was wearing the dress of transparent stuff and had never looked more beautiful.

"The time is come," Abeshu said, "your litter waits."

Star put her hand in Belzar's. "We are ready."

An hour later they stood together in a small niche hollowed out of the seven-foot thickness of the wall.

"Take the powder now," Abeshu whispered, "while I stand here so those nobles who come to watch see not."

Star and Belzar opened their lockets and swallowed the powder.

"May Bel receive your souls," Abeshu murmured.

"May Ishtar guard our love," Star said, and detached the ruby necklace, giving it to Abeshu.

Then Abeshu stood aside so all could see it was truly Star of Light and Belzar in the narrow place.

Abeshu gave an order, and as he and the priests started a chant, men began putting the great stones in place, entombing the lovers.

Belzar held Star closely. "But a little and eternity is ours, and even more happiness, my beloved."

Already the powder was making Star drowsy. She clung to her husband. "I love you, Belzar, I love you."

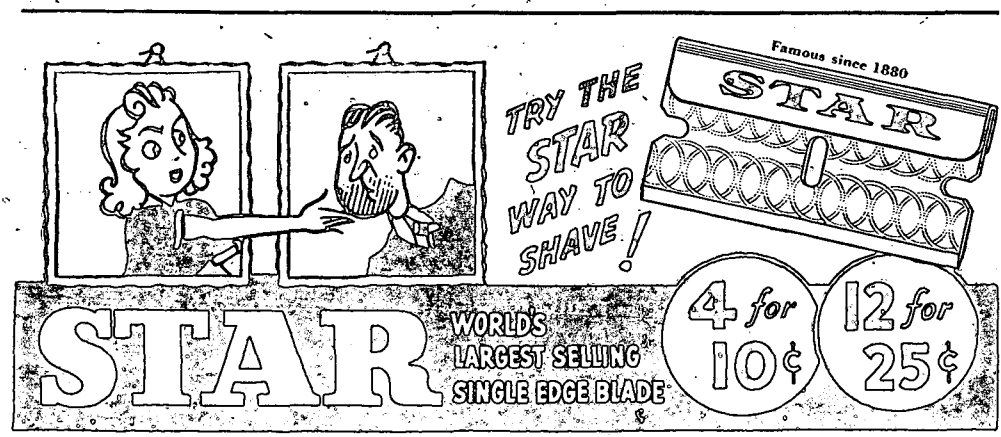
"And I you, who gave up so much for me."

"It was nothing . . . to . . . the joy—" A celestial music came to them, swelling in their ears, and out of it a voice spoke, calm and beautiful.

It was the voice of Ishtar. "Fear not, my children. At this moment you come to me. The love I promised is truly yours for all time to come."

The last stone was pushed into place. But Star and Belzar were already wrapped in light.

And the spirit of Alice Strand was back in her own body in her room in Aunt Amabel's house, with her hand on the patchwork quilt. Once again it had opened the doors of the past, but this time it had given me also a promise for the future.



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THE MAN FROM NOWHERE

by FRANK BELKNAP LONG, JR.

He came from somewhere beyond, perhaps, and he possessed a strange characteristic—a "heat" that melted time and space—

Illustrated by F. Kramer

BEYOND the fact that he had never been born, Revell was no different from other men. He smiled cordially when friends spoke to him, sat in restaurants and ate, lived in an attic studio in Greenwich Village and was conscious of a thrill when people praised his work.

He painted for a living, and his pictures were unusual, to say the least. His friends thought him an imaginative genius. His sunsets were all wrong, being green instead of red, and when he painted the stars you had to blink. Revell's stars resembled dazzling white porcupines lying coiled up in the sky.

He also painted animals which gave you the illusion of having just arisen from a chat with Sir John Mandeville. But everyone who knew Revell said that he was all right. Revell was a genius and it was his privilege to take liberties with nature. Nature was a bum artist anyway. She had no imagination and was always grumbling about cause and effect.

In Revell's paintings were scenes which put the cart before the horse. Such as a storm breaking furiously in a clear sky, with rain coming down and lightning, and people running backward across dry pavements to the shelter of wet buildings. Or a submarine torpedoing a ship, the crew of the ship standing calmly on deck watching the torpedo ascending straight up into the sky.

Jim North met Revell at a Village studio party. It was past midnight, and North was sitting on the floor talking to an attractive, dark-haired girl about Revell's sunsets. The girl was smiling at him, her large, gazelle-like eyes warmly radiant in the dim light. Although the girl wasn't an intellectual type, North liked her. She was a good listener. Her dark beauty was soothing; her vocal apparatus silent most of the time.

She appeared to agree with everything North said. She was in all respects the exact opposite of Helen Kilday. Helen Kilday was always criticizing him, treating him like a child. Helen didn't even appreciate Revell's sunsets. She thought Revell a charlatan and derided North for defending him.

North was pressing the dark girl's hand. "Picasso was sneered at, too," he said. "You can't cross new frontiers without arousing envy and resentment. Revell is a pioneer. He's setting up new guideposts in an unexplored wilderness."

"I am deeply flattered," said a voice above them.

North raised startled eyes and stared in consternation. Revell was more than a little intoxicated. His hair was tousled, and his eyes were glowing with a spectral, tarsierlike brilliance which gave North the willies. He seemed to be looking at something which North couldn't see at all. He seemed to be looking right

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It was clear he was falling from that rooftop—but he was falling UP!

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through the walls of the room and out into space.

"You must forgive me for eavesdropping," Revell said. "But in my present mellow state it is permissible to snoop. I am simply a detached observer, a super-Winchell."

He crashed with appalling violence. His short, compact body quivered as it struck the floor, upsetting the snack table of his host and scattering sandwiches and cheese wafers in all directions.

North gasped and leaped to his assistance. But Revell wasn't accepting aid from anyone. He brushed aside North's proffered help and arose with surprising swiftness. He ascended on his knees and elbows and then straightened miraculously, seeming to have shed his befuddlement in a flash.

"I'll be all right," he said. "I just didn't feel it creeping up on me."

North nodded sympathetically. "We never do," he said. "Shall I get you some black coffee?"

Revell smiled. "Fresh air would be better," he said. "I feel like walking."

"Yeah, so do I," said North. "I intended to push off an hour ago. If you'll wait till I locate my overcoat, I'll join you."

"Sure thing," said Revell. "I've a coat of my own around here somewhere."

FIVE MINUTES later they were walking together along Charles Street, the artist's stocky form bundled in a Scotch mist topcoat.

"I'm afraid I made a spectacle of myself," apologized Revell. "I had seven Martinis and a Tom Collins. But I'm dead sober now."

North turned and stared at him in perplexity. "I don't see how you sobered up so quickly," he said.

"It was easy," replied Revell. "I just undrank those cocktails."

"You *what?*"

Revell sighed. "I'm afraid you wouldn't understand," he said. "I have—peculiar gifts."

North was silent for a moment. Suddenly he said: "I'm an artist, too, you know. Perhaps I should say—a dabbler in the arts."

"Oh!" said Revell. "Well, so am I, for that matter. A dabbler. I like to get the strangeness down on canvas, chiefly for my own satisfaction. I don't care a hang what people think."

"Your paintings *are* strange," said North. "But here in the Village people seem to understand them. Your dealer is swamped with orders for them."

"Yes," conceded Revell. "In my humble way I am a commercial success. But that isn't my main objective. So long as my paintings sell I am grateful, for I have to eat. But that isn't why I paint."

"Why *do* you paint?"

"To work it off harmlessly. Painting to me is a sort of catharsis."

"To work what off?" asked North, his brow furrowing.

Revell sighed and stared down the long, dismal street. The block which they were traversing was distinctly atmospheric. On both sides of them were dimly lighted cafés and basement honkatonks. Red and green electric signs flaunted such titles as "Tony's Old Place," "El Moderado," the "Black Kitten," the "Devil's Oven."

The block was empty, because the hour was an intermediate one. Atmosphere seekers from out of town seldom tarried along the bohemian length of Charles Street in the small hours, and the Village natives had yet to emerge from their all-night guzzlings below pavement level.

Revell raised his arm slowly. "To

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escape from the temptation to do *this*," he said.

The street began unmistakably to tilt. It was horrible, frightening. The pavement beneath them seemed to sink downward and the vista ahead to quiver and recede.

The very signs changed. Around the red and green signs appeared dancing fortifications like the aura of migraine, and the wind began to howl in their ears.

From a cellar honkatonk a man and woman emerged, staggering backward. The man was slurring his syllables, his voice raised in drunken protest.

"I thoush we wash having asnother," he complained. "Whash the idea?"

"It wasn't my idea," shrilled the woman. "We just went into the place."

The man ceased suddenly to stagger. As he moved with the woman across the street his shoulders straightened and his voice shed its sibilancy.

"Listen, Jane," he pleaded. "I'm all right now. I can take care of myself. Stop pulling me backward."

"What happened to us?" exclaimed the woman. "We were pie-eyed and now we're . . . we're completely sober."

The man nodded. "We must be losing our grip," he complained.

Revell lowered his arm. Slowly the street swung up until it was level again, and the couple swirled back into the honkatonk, their bodies jerking as they descended through a grille-work gate and down wooden stairs toward the raucous strains of a swing orchestra.

REVELL WIPED sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand. "It's always a strain," he said, "but I *enjoy* doing it."

North was trembling. His jaw hung open and his skin was as pallid as a fungus growth.

"God!" he muttered. "It's creeping up on me. I didn't have seven Martinis, but I had enough."

"So?" said Revell, a faint, mocking smile twisting his bearded lips. "Think you can get home all right?"

"I live just west of Greenwich Avenue," North said. "I'm sure I can make it."

"Good. It seems we're neighbors. This is my place."

Revell had stopped walking and was nodding up at the red brick façade of a house which dated back to the late eighteenth century. It was a typical Village survival, its antique chimney pots having looked down on generations of New Yorkers before the coming of the artist clans.

Revell extended his hand. "Drop in tomorrow or the next day," he said. "I'm working on something now that should interest you. It's nearly finished, but it doesn't quite satisfy me. I may have to go back and unpaint it a little here and there."

"Thanks," muttered North. "I'll . . . I'll surely drop in, Revell."

It was curious, but he didn't feel drunk. Revell's long, artistic fingers remained for an instant in his clasp, exerting a friendly pressure on his palm.

"Be seeing you," he said.

North did not notice the tingling immediately. It was not until he had crossed Seventh Avenue, and was within half a block of his lodgings on Ashland Place that he became aware that his hand didn't feel right.

At first he thought it was simply the alcohol working off through his fingertips. He'd have to jam on the brakes, he told himself. Alcoholic neuritis was no joke. If he wasn't

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careful, he'd end up in Bellevue.

He raised his hand suddenly and looked at it. All the color drained from his face, leaving it ashen. His thumb and forefinger were O. K., but the other digits *coiled*. Like writhing snakes they twisted backward across the top of his hand.

Coiling, twisting—his hand in the dim light resembled a squirmy echinoderm raiding a nest of worms. His middle finger was the worst. It was twisting into a tight ball on the back of his hand. Like the coiled antenna of a moth, like—

Zoological similes were leaping unbidden into his mind. Sick with terror, he turned and went reeling out into the street.

The girl in the high-powered sport roadster had been averaging seventy all across town. When North stepped from the curb she was demonstrating to the boy beside her that she could drive with one hand while intoxicated.

She screamed when she saw North's tall body rise above the windshield, and go shooting off at right angles to the car. Running down a man was a new experience for her and for a moment she lost control. The car zigzagged, plunging erratically across Seventh Avenue and careening up the dark length of West Charles Street.

The boy beside her tittered. "Step on it, toots," he urged. "It's a helluva long drive back to New Haven."

HELEN KILDAY flushed resentfully, and dug the paper plug out of North's speaking tube with a penknife. She knew what the plug signified. North was having one of his secluded spells. The plug meant that he didn't want young lady visitors to annoy him.

It was a shame. The boy was painting himself into the ground. Why couldn't he treat his friends civilly when they called?

It was a bright spring morning and the Village pulsed with optimistic, sprouting life. Small green vines were pushing through cracks in the pavement in front of North's apartment, and an alley cat was lazing in the sunlight on the wooden steps which led down to the janitor's quarters. Across the street a couple of natives were strolling arm in arm, the girl carrying an easel, the boy looking damned glad that he wasn't a clerk in an office.

Helen Kilday started ringing North's bell and shouting into the tube. "Hello, up there. This is Helen. Can I come up? Hello, hello?"

There was no answer. The girl scowled and rang another bell. It was a shoddy trick, but she had to get into the apartment.

A voice said petulantly through another tube: "Look, Jerry, I told you I haven't got five bucks. Go away and let me finish my novel."

The girl rang another bell. This time the door clicked invitingly. She pushed it open and ascended three flights of stairs to North's floor-through apartment.

The door of the apartment was ajar. Helen crept stealthily close to it, her feminine curiosity aroused. North was speaking to someone. She could hear his voice distinctly. It was tremulous with amazement.

"You say I was run down *before* the car struck me. Good heavens, man, do you realize what you're saying?"

"I realize perfectly," said a voice which Helen failed to recognize. "The accident happened incompletely. That's why you were merely shaken up a bit."

"But my hand—"

"Your hand's all right now, isn't it? Stop worrying. I've told you

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what happened. I was feeling a little high last night and I let myself go. One gets tired of working with pigments exclusively. I knew a little of the . . . the instability would flow into you when I shook your hand. But I also knew it would wear off in a few hours. You don't seem to realize that I saved your life."

"I'm grateful, of course," said North. "If what you say is true—"

"Of course it's true. I have peculiar gifts. Nothing could have happened to you completely last night. That handshake saved you, swirled you into a sort of—well, safety zone."

"And now it's worn off?"

"Completely, North. But I'm glad you phoned. I wouldn't want you to think me unsympathetic."

Indignation swept Helen Kilday as she stood pressed close to the door, listening. North wasn't painting at all. At ten in the morning he was talking midnight nonsense to someone as pickled as himself.

Furiously she pushed the door open and advanced into the apartment.

North gasped when he saw her. He was standing still and straight by the fire grate in his living room studio, his tall boyish figure illumined by sunlight from a window to the right of him. His face was exceedingly pale and peaked-looking. His right eye was swollen shut and a wide strip of adhesive tape concealed the contours of his jaw, subtly altering his entire expression.

A twinge of solicitude tempered Helen Kilday's rage. North's jaw was his strongest feature. Unsupported by its firmness, he seemed helplessly childlike and in need of assistance. He had been smoking a cigarette but when he saw her he flicked it into the grate and shuddered convulsively.

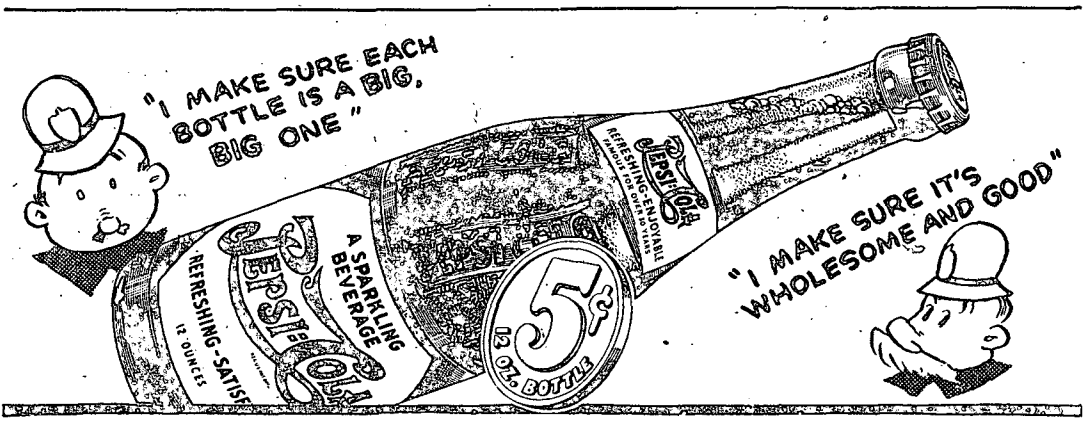
"Why didn't you ring the buzzer?" he exclaimed. "I didn't expect you."

"You'll hear the buzzer ring in a few minutes," said North's guest.

North's guest was standing by the window. A stocky, broad-shouldered man in the prime of life, with graying hair and pale, aristocratic features, he was staring at Helen Kilday with eyes so level and calm that they chilled her heart like ice.

"The buzzer hasn't rung yet," he elaborated. "I'm afraid my presence here has prevented this young lady's entire arrival."

A sudden glow appeared in the depths of his calm eyes. "By George, North, I'm glad I didn't wait for another cup of coffee. The first one scalded me and I set it aside and then there was a damned



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twisting disappearance. Like a little typhoon in the cup. It happens when I get angry or upset about anything. I concentrate on objects and—*pouf*."

North was staring at him in bewilderment. "Coffee? I don't understand—"

Revell sighed. "That was stupid of me. My mind leaps ahead and I forget that you're in a different zone. I've got to stop thinking out loud, elliptically. What I'm trying to say is that I'm glad I came right over here without finishing my breakfast. This young lady is physically *perfect*. I knew I would meet her after I painted her, but I didn't think it would happen this morning."

There was a sudden buzz.

"There," said Revell. "Now she has completely arrived. She is not only here in this room, but she has rung the bell and ascended the stairs."

Helen Kilday was feeling physically ill. The stranger was staring at her again, his cold eyes roaming over her with a candor that was somehow frightening. It wasn't a primitive candor. The stares of primitive males could be parried with contempt, but she had no weapon against Revell's merciless scrutiny.

Revell said: "You might introduce us, North. She will have to pose for me, but when she knows who I am she won't object. Women instinctively trust men who can be fervent without displaying simian traits."

The girl was aware of North's low voice reluctantly stammering. "Helen, this is Henry Revell. You've heard me speak of his work."

Revell smiled at her. "I hope you won't think me presuming," he said. "I'm simply trying to save one of my best pictures. You see, I've just completed a portrait of you, but unless you pose for me it will unpaint itself."

There was something utterly compulsive about his stare now. Helen felt her resistance dwindling, dissolving. He didn't frighten her. Not any more. There was something strangely soothing about him. His face had become a blur of entrancing darkness which smelled as sweet as a rose.

Revell withdrew his gaze abruptly. He glanced at his wrist watch. "I must be going," he said. "I shall expect you, Miss Kilday, at two this afternoon."

Ten minutes later Helen Kilday was trying hard to remember exactly how Revell looked. She closed her eyes, striving to visualize his face and figure. She shivered a little, a tingling pleasure going through her when she conjured up the shadowy outlines of his nose and forehead. His beard had also attracted her, but she couldn't remember whether it was black or gray.

North was standing apprehensively above her, staring down at her shining auburn hair. Revell's request had given him an ugly shock. He tried to shut out the disturbing realization that had just come to him. He didn't want her to pose for Revell because he loved her. He was jealous of Revell and furious at himself. She was the exacting, domestic type and it was monstrous that he should want to marry her. He would lose his independence straight off.

In fact, marrying her would be almost as bad as not marrying her. It was damnably unfortunate that he had to choose between sacrificing his independence and letting his life become a dreadful, empty waste.

He said suddenly: "I can't have you going to his studio alone. I don't trust him."

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She raised resentful eyes and stared at him. "I'm sorry you're so narrow-minded," she said. "You'd trust your life to a great surgeon, wouldn't you?"

"But artists are different, Helen. They're not like surgeons. All artists are a little mad and Revell's paintings are—well, pagan."

"So are yours," she retorted. "I'm going to pose for him, and you can't stop me."

IT WAS past midnight when North arrived home that night. He was aware of stairs slipping out from under him, of a climb that seemed interminable through darkness. He cursed the janitor for not leaving a light in the lower hallway. He was paying a fantastic rental merely for the privilege of living in the Village and was certainly entitled to illumination when he needed it. Not the kind that he had inside of him, but the kind that came from electric bulbs high up in the wall somewhere.

The walls were conspiring against him. As he ascended the stairs they seemed to sweep down and envelop him. He was smothering on the stairs. He was inside a whale. He was Jonah. He was a German U-boat commander taking one on the chin from the British navy. He was Dr. Beebe. Deep under the sea he was looking at fantastic fishes squirming through darkness.

The darkness diminished as he ascended toward the upper hallway. There seemed to be a light in his apartment which crept out over the stairs. The door was ajar and beyond the door he could hear the sound of muffled sobbing.

Someone was sobbing inside his apartment. He stumbled toward the door, groggily, gropingly. He pushed the door open, wide open, with his palm. He didn't grip the knob of the door; just flattened his palm and pushed. The door was a straw man standing in his way. Down with it, push it aside, get to the sobbing quickly.

Into the room he lurched, his legs quaking like oscillations on a seismograph. His sense of alarm, growing by leaps and bounds, was becoming overpowering.

Someone had turned on all the lights in the apartment. He could feel his vision swimming at a great distance from his face, floundering helplessly in a sea of light.

A chair and two tables swam unsteadily into view. Then the mantel and the grate and a sofa with a slim form on it. The form was stirring a little. It had long white arms. The longest arms he had ever seen curled around the top of the sofa.

He stared incredulously, his lips going dry. A body like that couldn't be human. It was far too long to be human, far too attenuated. It was at least seven feet long.

But it was moving, stirring. Sobs came from it. Long and pale and slim—the legs coiled downward over the bottom of the sofa and out upon the floor.

There was no logic in the way it was dressed. There was simply a little, shriveled tunic covering the center of its body. Wait, wait. It wasn't a tunic. It was a tailor-made suit. There was a skirt and a coat, but they were— God, how horrible. It looked like a doll's suit would on an adult, except that it was wide enough for the body. It was wide enough, but not nearly long enough, and it was that discrepancy which made the entire garment look shriveled. The long, thin figure on the sofa seemed to be wearing a suit which it had outgrown.

North felt the hair prickle along the periphery of his scalp. He be-

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came dead sober in an instant. The face of the figure had been buried in a pillow, but suddenly it turned over and rose slowly, its long arms going out in piteous appeal.

"Is that you, Jim? I can't see you clearly. There is something wrong with my eyes."

North's spine congealed. The face that stared up at him was a long, hideous caricature of Helen Kilday's face. It seemed to be in a state of flux. The mouth was curling up like a burning cedar chip. The forehead tapered to a thin, wavering cone. The eyes were mere vertical slits set close together above a nose that was melting and dripping like tallow in bright sunlight.

The voice was Helen's voice, and the hair which sprouted from the conical skull was Helen's hair—a rich, lustrous auburn. But the rest of Helen was a ghastly parody of the girl he loved. Quivering arms like tentacles flowed about his neck and embraced his shoulders.

"Help me up, Jim. I can't rise."

Helen Kilday's throat was a flowing sea of whiteness, an unstable expanse of melting flesh.

"I was all right when I left the studio," she moaned. "He . . . he put me out. He said the tension was becoming unbearable. He said he didn't want to harm me."

Anguish engulfed North so that he could not speak. He looked down at her and all his nerves shrieked in anguish. He took hold of her wrists and gently untangled her long, cold arms.

A fury such as he had never known before was inside him now.

Veronal. A pistol. Veronal to quiet her while he went over and had a grim talk with Revell. With a pistol centered on him Revell would *have* to do something.

He would have to do something. It would be either that, or: "I'll blow your brains out, Revell. I'll drill you through.

"Save her, Revell. Restore her or I'll blow your disease-twisted brain right out of your skull."

He was mumbling to himself as he reeled through the night again. She had been able to swallow, thank God. She was sleeping now, the hypnotic having smothered the waking terror in her brain. Stretched out in repose, her long body quiescent, the instability arrested a little by the drug.

North's fingers tightened on the pistol in his pocket. It was a pocket Mauser, small, but powerful enough to knock a man down when fired at close range.

His eyes roamed about the street as he walked toward Seventh Avenue. The natives were beginning to emerge from swing cellars and sidewalk cafés and the night was filled with voices. Gay, reckless voices trading small-hour farewells.

The wail of the fire siren cut through the slurred "goo' nights," with the shrill impertinence of a banshee on a tear. Down the street poured a wash of red light, blinding the stunned Villagers and causing them to forswear all zigzagging for the night.

They stood frozen in front of dark doorways, their hilarity ebbing as a bell-clanging hook-and-ladder tore down the street, followed by three subsidiary units of motorized, fire-fighting might. The chief's car brought up the rear, a red comet with a blazing tail of light.

North gasped and swung about. Animated by inexplicable forebodings he moved out into the street and stared up the long block, his gaze traveling across the luminous blur of Seventh Avenue to the nebu-

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losity which was Charles Street. All he could see of Charles Street was a blackness shot with flames. The flames seemed to be pouring out of some building near the middle of the block.

A convulsive shuddering seized North. Somehow he knew, he knew already. He began to run.

It took him five minutes to reach the middle of Charles Street and by then there was no chance of his getting through to Revell. The police were ahead of him. They had established a cordon, and were pushing pedestrians outward in a widening circle.

"G'wan, keep moving. Over on the other side. You wanta get kilt?"

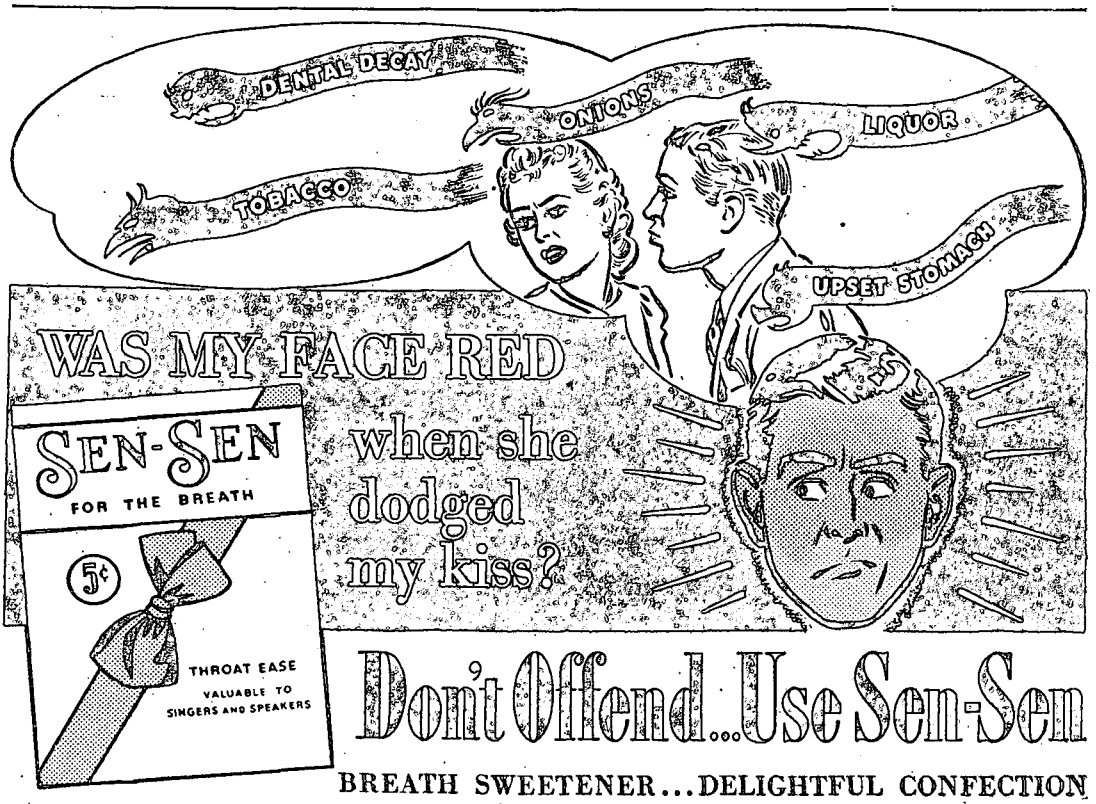
"But I live in there, officer."

"I can't help that, buddy. You gotta keep moving."

North scurried diagonally across the street and wedged himself in a narrow, dark alleyway directly opposite the burning building. He stared up, his heart hammering against his ribs.

The ancient red brick house was a blazing inferno. Grim-faced firemen were directing hose streams against windows which were belching smoke and flame. The fanlighted doorway was enveloped in a writhing incandescence, and the roof was obscured by a billowing sea of smoke which swirled down into the street and choked North's breath, causing him to gasp and sputter.

The roaring, swollen flames heated the entire street. North could feel the awful heat right down to his soles. He stood rigid despite spasms of coughing, staring up at the roof. Something seemed to be moving up there. Something dark and straight,



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moving through the flames.

The smoke shifted suddenly, receding in wind-blown spirals from a blackened chimney pot and a portion of the roof. Instantly the crowd below let out a roar. The police cordon quivered.

A woman screamed hysterically: "There's a man up there. He's going to jump. Oh, God, he's going to jump."

Revell was standing on the edge of the roof staring down into the street. His stocky body was enveloped in flames and his face was twisted into a tight, mournful mask. His expression in the red glare seemed somehow Satanic—as though he had dwelt for millennia in hell and endured eternal fires without complaint.

Unmistakably he was preparing to leap. His posture was that of a man about to hurl himself recklessly into space. North went cold all over. He mustn't let Revell leap. He'd have to stop Revell from killing himself. If Revell killed himself, Helen Kilday would be better off dead.

With a despairing cry North ran out into the street. "Wait, Revell," he shouted. "They're getting a net. Don't jump, Revell!"

It was a futile warning. Revell did not wait. He swung his arms back and leaped swiftly from the roof. The crowd below screamed as his ascending body struck the roof of the adjoining building a glancing blow and started falling skyward.

He receded feet foremost, his coat billowing out over his head. There was no doubt in North's mind that Revell was really *falling*. The crowd became suddenly so utterly still that he was quite sure they had sensed it, too.

Revell was falling into the sky. Superficially, he appeared to be ascending, but subjectively his flight conveyed an exactly opposite impression. Looking up, North ceased to be aware of up and down. He saw merely the far, glimmering stars and Revell dwindling to a faint speck in the night sky and finally vanishing altogether.

North pressed moist palms to his temples and staggered backward toward the crowd. A policeman grabbed his elbow and spun him around.

"Next time you step out of line, buddy, I'll run you in. That building's going to collapse any minute now."

NORTH's face was livid and he was twitching uncontrollably when he returned across Seventh Avenue and went reeling eastward. He wasn't intoxicated any longer. Tension and horror had neutralized all the alcohol inside him. The dizziness he now felt was due to strain alone.

The weapon in his pocket was his one remaining solace; all hope had been stripped from him. He would kill both Helen and himself. He couldn't live without her and she would welcome death.

So subjective was his torment that he was not aware of walking purposely at all. He turned in at his apartment without realizing that he had left the street. His steps were automatic, his body as rigid as a sleepwalker's.

He started fumbling for his keys, his mind seething with despair. A suicide pact. It was the only solution and Helen would welcome—

He awoke suddenly to the realization that he was not alone. Someone was clinging to him and sobbing. He was standing in the dark vestibule of his apartment with a woman in his arms. For an appalling instant he weighed the possibility that he had gone completely mad.

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It didn't fit together. No woman would come into the arms of a reeling stranger like that, would gravitate to him in darkness and kiss him with warm, eager lips for no reason at all. She was just Helen's height and her waist was as slim as Helen's, and her kisses—

He trembled with sudden joy. Everything about her was familiar, even the way her voice lilted when emotion overcame her.

"Jim, I'm all right now. I can see you again. But why did you leave me? When I woke and found you gone I was frightened. I thought perhaps you had gone for a doctor. I came downstairs hoping I'd be able to catch you and call you back. I . . . I found a note stuffed in your mailbox. I thought at first you had left it there for me. But it's from *him*, Jim. I had to strike a match to read the address—"

She was pressing a folded slip of paper against his palm. "You'd better read it, Jim. It may be important."

North read the note by the light of a pocket flash. He held her hand tightly, because even a note from Revell was dangerous. It might pack occult dynamite; it might shatter their lives even now. He needed to feel that he was protecting her with all of himself—his body, mind and soul. He read the note aloud in a strained whisper:

"Dear North:

"When you read this letter I shall be gone. I detest explanations and apologies, but you have called me your friend and I should like to remain your friend, North. It is the one little human taint which I shall carry away with me—the desire to be remembered by someone on Earth.

"You see, I don't come from your human world at all. From your point of view I am a man from nowhere. The body I wore I constructed by a slow, painful process of trial and error. You've no idea how long it took me to get the brain right.

"It would be impossible to describe my real nature in human language, but if you

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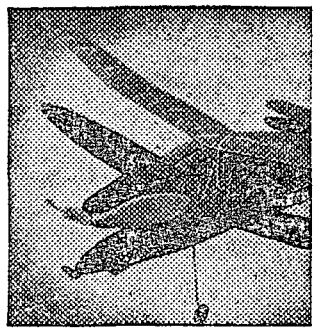

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wish, you may think of me as a sort of heat. A heat that can melt and dissolve everything in your world.

"I held myself in. I fought against the temptation to do it on a damaging scale. While I dwelt with you I could *melt events*, distort and transpose them. I could even make events *unhappen*. But I sublimated the compulsion, worked it off on canvas. I painted melted events, and of course they looked all wrong to you.

"But you liked them, didn't you? You got a kick out of them. Everyone did. Everyone admired them. That's what I like about the Village, North. They aren't hidebound by silly conventions down here. I could even paint the emerald sunsets and the brittle stars of *home*. A man can really paint when he knows he is going to have a sympathetic audience.

"I must finish. All afternoon the tension has been increasing. I can't remain in your world, North. I might melt it, wreck everything—even the great nebula in Andromeda.

"I sent her back to you when I felt the tension growing. I didn't want to melt her permanently. For a few hours she may remain slightly plastic. She was sitting so close to me that I'm afraid I warped her a little. But the strong human pattern will waver back. Your hand's all right now, isn't it?

"I hope you'll marry her, North. She'll make you a good wife. And North—if you have children and one of them is a boy, name him Henry Revell—North. It will be wonderful to know that somewhere on earth, perhaps in the Village I shall never forget, is a young lad bearing my name, the son of a far-off human friend. May he inherit your talents and dream youth's long dream in an attic studio close to the stars.

"Affectionately,
"HENRY REVELL."

Dying Tramp

by EDGAR DANIEL KRAMER

I have been tramping valleys and hills,
Hearing the thunders, mocking the rills;
Bunking in haymows when the wind blew;
Sleeping in clover, white with the dew;
Winter and summer, springtime and fall,
Trudging the highways, heeding their call,
Now I'm grown weary, time's come to rest,
Hid in the shadows crowding earth's breast.

Eyes won't stay open, choking for breath;
Just a bit woozy; this must be Death
Coming to whisper, saying I'll go
Hunting a highway that I don't know;
Wonder if mooching stays with the clay,
Wonder if stealing walks the new way,
Where I'll be faring, farther than far?
Dying? I'm walking out with a star—

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MASTER GERALD OF CAMBRAY

BY NAT SCHACHNER

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Master Gerald Of Cambray

by NAT SCHACHNER

The new master was very strange, and had very strange ideas—ideas the thirteenth century wasn't ready for.

Illustrated by Isip

Guy of Salisbury lay sprawled across the rude pallet of coarse muslin stuffed with straw, just as he had fallen the night before. He had not troubled to remove his long trunk hose of scarlet hue nor the pointed, wine-colored shoon that laced high over his ankles. Puffed, illicit sleeves and a cambric shirt sheathed a brawny form and knotted muscles. Even in drunken sleep his features were firm and frank with goodly youth. His tonsured pate—sign of clericus and student—showed early need for a barber's ministrations. A fine golden fuzz was sprouting and making dim the rounded barrier from close-clustered, leonine locks. His mouth was open and he snored.

His fellow martinet, Jean Corbin, shook him by the shoulder. "Wake up, Guy," he said urgently. "Wake up!"

"Huh!" grunted the sleeper, and sought to turn over.

"Wake up," repeated Jean, a dark, dapper fellow from the south of France. "It is already an hour past matins and furthermore Martin, the beadle, is here to take you before the Rector's Court."

"Huh!" Guy grunted a second time and opened his eyes.

The little man who had stood respectfully in the shadows of the bare, low-eaved garret now came forward. He was fat and puffing from his unwonted climb up four narrow, high-pitched stairs. In his pudgy hand he carried the wand and emblem of his office.

"It is true, Master Guy," he said. "The noble rector of the university demands your presence immediately you are ready. There is a complaint."

Guy rubbed his pate a moment to dispel the mingled fumes of wine and sleep. Then he heaved slowly to his feet and stared—six feet of bone and whipcord muscles—at the beadle.

"The Rector's Court?" he demanded sharply. "What wish they of me?" His eye flicked to the illicit unsheathed sword that stood in a corner, its point embedded in the unpainted floor. Bright flecks of spilled wine had dried upon its hilt; but near the tip there were darker, more somber spots of rusty brown.

The beadle turned his discreet gaze away from the weapon. He knew better than to see that which the rules of Paris forbade to students. He gripped his wand of office more firmly.

"The man, Hugues, innkeeper of La Cloche Perse," he explained in apologetic fashion, "died past midnight."

Guy shrugged. "The more fool he. I did but pink him when he rushed on me with screams and tirades."

"You do not know your strength," Jean Corbin declared, eying his comrade's gigantic dimensions with admiration. "You pierced him clean through the body."

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Guy yawned and stretched his arms. "He deserved to die. His wine was stale and diluted with water. He swore to me it was a clear Burgundy and of the finest vintage. I took but a mouthful and spat it out on him for a vile usurer. He seized a cudgel and had at me."

Jean grinned. "You forget. You followed your righteous expectoration with the filled flagon. It caught him a pretty clip on the side of the head." Jean began to chuckle. "I shall never forget how ludicrous the rogue looked standing there, drenched from head to foot in the lees of his own adulterated drink."

"You will come quietly, Master Guy?" asked the beadle warily.

"Of course," Guy laughed. "I will miss the morning lecture of Master Heinrich of Brabant on the ethics, but he is a dull dog and it will be no great loss. Wait but a moment and I shall go with you."

He took the tabard—the long, black outer garment of the student—from its pegs on the wall and slipped it over his forbidden finery. The beadle stood with eyes averted, puffing grateful relief. He had expected trouble with Guy of Salisbury, and he had been prepared to retreat at the first sign of violence.

They emerged from the rickety, overleaning house into the cold light of morning and the gathering cries of the crooked street. The *Petit-Pont,* lined with curious wooden houses, spanned the Seine to the left bank and the scattered quarters of the university.

The beadle picked up his robe delicately as a rooting pig lurched against his fat legs. He eyed with distaste the piles of odorous garbage at his feet. "You live like a veritable martinet, Master Guy," he complained, "a nesting swallow under eaves. It was understood among your nation that your kin were wealthy."

"So they are," grinned Guy, as they clattered over the wooden bridge. "But they cut me off with not even a sou some weeks ago. My respected father believes I've had enough of the fleshpots of Paris. He desires me to return to our English acres and play the knight. I prefer the clash of disputations, however, to the play of swords; and so I remain, penniless but happy."

Martin looked doubtful. He had just seen the carved handiwork that this mad Englishman had left in La Cloche Perse, but long ago he had learned that a held tongue was better than a coat of mail.

THE Rector's Court was in the rented hall of the English Nation—to which Guy himself belonged. The rector sat in state—a beardless man of four and twenty—not much older than Guy himself. He was magnificent in purple and ermine and the tipped fur around his neck shaded his long, narrow face. Clustered around him were others seated—grave and reverend seniors—all older than the rector. They wore the distinctive cappa—or cope—reserved exclusively to the masters. By their color one could tell their station and the university of their origin. The masters of Paris wore bright scarlet, with tippets and hoods of fur. The fur was not merely for ostentation—spring in Paris was cold and the drafty, unheated halls brought agues to uncovered tonsures. The doctors of theology were resplendent in red, while one from Beauvais shone in a cobalt-blue.

The beadle extended his wand in greeting to the court and puffed importantly: "I have brought before you Guy of Salisbury, even as your worships demanded."

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The rector nodded affably to the English giant. He and Guy knew each other well. They had had many a nocturnal adventure together. In fact, Pierre of Normandy was but this six months a master and less than two weeks the rector. Because he was of noble blood and had many *livres tournois* in his purse, he flashed a brief few weeks in this seat of power.

"I am sorry it was necessary to call you before us, Guy," Pierre said with a cough of apology, "but the innkeeper has died of your thrust, and his wife lodged a complaint with his guild, who in turn notified the Provost of Paris, who in turn laid the case before King Louis. He thereupon sent his messenger to the lord bishop and therefore the chancellor asked us to inquire into the matter."

Guy nodded carelessly. "I do not blame you; it is the form. Yet the rascal deserved what he got. His wine is the worst in Paris and I did but admonish him gently thereon when he came at me with a cudgel."

The rector coughed. "I know his wine; it *is* atrocious. But you . . . ah . . . slit his paunch with a sword. A sword, according to the regulations, is a forbidden weapon."

"A sword?" cried Guy, pretending indignant surprise. "Who said I used a sword? It was a mere knife, such as I use for trencher weapon—a matter of a few inches of steel. No more."

The rector coughed again. "There are the man's wife and seven witnesses who depose it was a sword, and a mighty one at that."

"Were there any students or masters of the university among them?"

"Not a one," admitted the rector. "They are all burghers of the town."

"Rabble and offal!" Guy declared triumphantly. "Those rascals would swear themselves into the arms of the foul fiend to decry a clericus. They envy us our privileges."

"True!" Pierre nodded. "We shall therefore waive the item of the sword and proceed with the mere manslaughter."

He leaned to the right and to the left and whispered to his court. Fur-clad heads inclined gravely and resplendent cappas rustled. The scrivener of the court dipped his quill expectantly into the horn of ink and poised it over the parchment sheet before him.

"We are agreed," said the rector finally. His face took on a prim, severe expression. "Take heed to our judgment. For the slaying of one Hugues, innkeeper of La Cloche Perse, a burgher of Paris and a member of a lawful guild, Guy of Salisbury, clericus and student of the university, and hence entitled to all the rights, privileges and immunities relating thereto, is required to attend matin mass for three weeks running, to say twenty Aves and Pater Nosters daily during said period, to make confession once every week for three months and humbly announce his fault; and furthermore, the said Guy of Salisbury shall purchase for the benefit of this court twenty quarts of good red wine, of a grade not worse than the first grade of Burgundy. So let it be inscribed."

Guy shook his head. "You are severe in your judgment, amplissimus rector, yet would I not object had I more than a few wretched sous in my purse. Perhaps you have not heard that my noble father mislikes the learning of Paris and has cut me off from all supplies?"

The rector looked disappointed. The reverend doctors pulled long faces. Already they had been licking their lips over the prospective fine.

"I had not heard," sighed Pierre finally. "In that event, perhaps ten quarts?"

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"Not a dram more than five," Guy declared firmly. "And at that I must borrow from my nation. Or belike I should add other penances—such as praying in my shirt at Sainte-Geneviève with book and candle instead?"

"We will take the five quarts," said the rector hastily, and furred heads bobbed agreement. "But next time be more discreet with your . . . ah . . . knife. The populace is clamoring for our heads, and King Louis meditates a complaint to the bishop. What is the next case, beadle?"

THE BEADLE pointed to a queer little mouse of a man who shifted his weight uncertainly from foot to foot and blinked watery and amazed eyes at the scene before him.

"It is this stranger, l'amplissime. I found him wandering, starved and wholly bewildered, through the *Rue du Fouarre* at dawn. He did not seem to know how he got there, nor even where he was, and his Latin has a barbarous lilt to it that made understanding difficult. I deemed it wise, therefore, to bring him before your court for inquiry and disposition."

The little man started forward indignantly. He seemed suddenly to have found his tongue. "My Latin barbarous!" he cried. "That is a base lie. For twenty years have I studied and taught the tongue of Cicero and Virgil, of Tacitus and Ovid. There is no one in all America who speaks a purer, more classical Latin than myself."

Guy paused on his way out and stared in amazement. Martin, the beadle, had spoken true. The man *did* speak a queer Latin. The syllables were strained, and the inflections odd. There was a formal pomposity about his speech that smacked of the manuscripts rather than the free and living flow of ordinary, every-day give and take.

But the strangeness of his tongue was the least of the matter. His clothes were thoroughly outlandish and incredibly ugly. He wore no cappa, or tabard, or even toga. His spindly legs were incased in two long cylinders of some woolen cloth, his neck was surrounded by a high, starched wide band that seemed to choke him, and from which dangled pendent into the mufflings of his coat a streak of flame-red silk that could only have come from semi-mythical Cathay.

His countenance was mild and sear, like an autumn leaf. A gray stubble of unshaven beard dotted his face. Owlish eyes peered from behind a pair of most curious spectacles. Now spectacles in themselves were rare enough, but these were of a fashion and cunning manufacture such as Guy had never seen before. His forehead was lofty and baldish. Gray wisps of hair disclosed no sign of tonsure such as a cleric should possess.

Pierre of Normandy surveyed him curiously. There was a stir among the doctors of theology.

"You invoke great names," Pierre told him, "but nevertheless your Latin is false in quantity and accent. Whence come you, stranger? I never heard of this land you call America."

The little man deflated suddenly. A strained, frightened look came over his countenance. His hand trembled as he made wiping movements over his forehead. "America?" he whispered. "I wish I knew. Yet if this incredible thing is true; if all of you are not the mere creations of a dream from which I must inevitably awake, then America is far beyond the sea, beyond the floods of time itself."

"Speak not in riddles, man," de-

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clared the rector peremptorily, "or, if you do, use the proper logical forms. The minor premise limps mightily in your argument. But you speak of lands beyond the sea. Everyone knows that the Western Ocean has no end; that it stretches to the base of purgatory itself. Now, please, no more nonsense. You claim to have studied and taught. From what university came your license and in what field—arts, civil law, the canon, medicine or in theology?"

The little man bowed humbly. "My name is Gerald Cambray. I am, or was—my senses are a bit confused—professor of Latin in Harvard University—*Universitas Harvardiensis*."

The rector looked puzzled. There arose a great buzz of whispering among the masters. Guy strained his wits. He had been a wandering scholar for several years—a goliard—with a pouch of bread at his side, a song on his lips, and a kiss for every wayside pretty wench; he had sought knowledge from the great teachers of every school from Oxford to Bologna; but never had he heard of this Harvard.

Neither had the rector. "I suppose," he said with fine sarcasm, "this university, which you claim, is in this equally mythical America?"

Gerald Cambray's eyes flashed. He seemed to Guy like a rabbit who puffs up with courage in defense of his hole and spits defiance at intruders.

"Harvard," he said with heat, "is a mighty school—the greatest in the world."

The court rocked with laughter at that. Even Guy, loitering, grinned widely. The scrivener howled. Martin, the beadle, quivered like a jelly. Everyone knew that Paris, eldest daughter of kings and favorite child of popes, was the shining luminary of the Universe. True, those who wished to become learned in the law went to Bologna; those who sought the rewards of medicine attended Montpellier or Salerno; but in all else—

Pierre of Normandy wiped his eyes with the ermine of his robe. "There is no mention of this great school of yours in any of our parchments. Belike it is some local creation of a petty princeling without the *ius ubique docendi*—the license to teach everywhere—that only the holy pope or the emperor may grant."

Gerald Cambray, the stranger, bethought himself and shivered. His fire vanished. He looked scared. Guy of Salisbury was moved by a sudden impulse. The bedraggled look of the man stirred a protective feeling in him. He strode over to the little man and clapped him kindly on the shoulder.

"How now, Gerald of Cambray," he said, "take heart. Here in Paris are men of every race and clime—even from Muscovy. Perhaps some comrade from your local *Studium* will appear."

The man in the curious costume shook his head. "No one else *can* appear. I was a mistake—if this is not a dream. Paris!" His round eyes grew rounder. "The University of Paris in the Middle Ages! Good Heaven!"

"I understand you not," Guy retorted with some asperity. "The Middle Ages, forsooth. We are moderns; this is a modern age. We have learned everything that God would wish us to know. Knowledge is complete, final. But come, you are obviously a stranger in our midst. What will you do to make your bread?"

Cambray sucked in his breath. "I could teach," he suggested timidly.

"That," declared the rector, "is

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impossible. In the first place, you belong to no nation."

"I could manage to enroll him in the English nation," declared Guy. "We have a number of foreigners in our midst—chiefly German."

"But I *am* English," cried Cambray joyfully, "or, rather, of English descent. See, I speak to you in the English tongue."

Guy listened carefully. "What says he?" Pierre demanded.

The English lad shook his head, frowning. "Now, by St. George," he swore, "this is indeed a marvel. His Latin was bad enough, but such a foul jargon which he now spews and insults by the name of my native tongue I never heard in all my years. Yet here and there in sooth there *is* a word or phrase that hath a familiar ring."

Cambray groaned. "What year is this?"

Pierre stared. "Are you mad or witless? Everyone knows that this is the year of Our Lord—1263."

The little man turned pale. To Guy it seemed that he had braced himself for a blow that he knew was coming; yet, when it came, it felled him just the same.

"Then it is not a dream," he whispered, half to himself. "No wonder the English of 1939 sounds strange to ears that know not even Chaucer."

"What say you?" asked Guy.

"Nothing," he muttered. "I thank you for your offer to induct me into your English nation. I can teach—I taught Latin for twenty years."

The rector laughed mockingly. "The veriest student is a better Latinist than you. The four nations that comprise the arts would never grant you a license in that tongue. What else know you?"

Guy stood close to him. He heard him muttering to himself. "Let me see. I know a smattering of science—physics, chemistry. Certainly far more than they could possible know. But one needs apparatus—which I wouldn't know how to handle myself. One needs techniques. History? Modern history isn't in existence yet. Ancient history—as I know it—they wouldn't believe. Geography? They would thing I was crazy. Literature? What good if the books are not yet written. Good Lord! What *could* I teach them? Mathematics? I know a little algebra, some geometry—I've heard of calculus. But— Ah, I have it! *Astronomy*. At least the Sun, the Moon, the planets and the stars are there to see. I know little enough in all conscience, but surely—"

Aloud he said: "I am acquainted with the stars and their motions, masters and doctors of Paris. I could teach students their motions and orbits, their sizes and plan."

The rector stirred. "Know you then the noble science of astrology?" he demanded eagerly. "Can you foretell the future from a reading of the stars?"

The little man shook his head vehemently. "That is nonsense," he declared. "The heavens have nothing to do with the future."

The doctor from Beauvais spoke up in peremptory manner. "The man is mad. Does he not know that there is a chair in astrology at Bologna; does he not know that Michael the Scot foretold future events for the emperor himself?"

The rector was disappointed. "Astronomy! Hm-m-m! Perhaps—You know, masters, we *do* find difficulty in fixing the date of the Resurrection in each year. It is the least of the Quadrivium, of course, but—"

After much cogitation it was so decided.

Master Gerald Cambray from the lands beyond the sea would be per-

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"If you reach for a cudgel," said Guy in a terrible voice, "I'll slit your throat from ear to ear. Now. Bring us food!"

mitted to gather such students as he could and teach the aspect of the heavens to them.

"Of course, the chancellor will have to issue a license to you in due form," Pierre announced. "But the worthy chancellor accepts our command in all things since our last secession." He turned to Martin, the beadle. "Next case!"

GUY SAW that the little man was bewildered. He saw other things as well. The new-fledged master required students. In Paris an unknown master in such a minor phase of the seven arts as astronomy would find them most difficult to obtain. And, no students, no fees. No fees, no bread or wine.

Guy himself was in a somewhat similar state—as to bread and wine. Last night, when he had run the scoundrelly innkeeper through, he had caroused away his last livre with a lordly gesture. He required money.

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He approached the befuddled master and took him by the arm. Unresisting he led him out of the hall, into the roaring street.

"I," he said, "am Guy of Salisbury, a student of the arts for many years. In some few days I am ready for my bachelor determination. I require money, you require pupils. Let us make a deal."

Cambray stared. "What do you mean?"

"Every new master," Guy explained, "needs a runner. A student who is well known among his fellows and popular; who can expiate the advantages of the learned master, who can promise them in the name of the master certain discounts on the fixed fees or a new robe at the end of the term, and who can thrust off the clamoring runners of other and inferior masters." Guy finished modestly: "I am such a man—for a commission, of course."

Cambray sputtered weakly: "But that is terrible. That is making a base commercial transaction of a noble profession."

"What would you?" Guy asked practically. "The master must live. There are a thousand clamoring licentiates seeking pupils. There are not enough to go round. Leave it to me, Gerald of Cambray. We shall make an excellent team between us. But first we must obtain for you a school in the *Rue du Fouarre*—Straw Street—and then we visit the taverns for pupils."

The street on which they walked was narrow, tortuous, liquid with mud and filth. Pigs rooted restlessly through the flung garbage; a dead dog exposed his sightless eyes to the thin sun. The rickety frame houses everhung the thoroughfare, and from the open street-level fronts came the sounds of hammering and thumping and the smell of good, seasoned leather. Here was a cobbler pounding at his last; here was a blacksmith striking sparks from an anvil on which lay a heated bend of iron. Long loaves of bread gave up their odors as they baked in crude ovens; a cabinet maker was building a lordly carriage with laborious adz and hammer. Apprentices, in leather aprons and brown wool hose, lounged in the doorways, crying out upon the passers-by, calling their masters' wares and interlarding business with pert remarks upon the blowzy washerwomen who hurried by to the banks of the Seine to rinse their clothes in that murky flood.

Cambray gulped. He looked a little green around the gills. He tried to hold his breath, failed. "Isn't . . . isn't it a bit stifling around here?" he strangled finally. "All that garbage— Why don't they clean the streets?"

Guy sniffed the air. "I smell nothing," he declared. "Except"—and he grinned—"the good odor of baking bread. Which reminds me; I have a few sous left." He darted into a bakeshop, came out holding a long, crusted loaf under his arm. He tore off a piece with his hand, crammed it into his mouth. He tore off another piece, offered it to Cambray.

The little man gulped again. He turned greener than ever. "I . . . I'm sorry," he whispered. "I . . . I'd vomit if I ate in this atmosphere."

Guy looked at him with a certain contemptuous pity. "You'll starve, then," he said placidly, and crammed another generous portion into his mouth.

As they dived through one narrow, crooked thoroughfare into another, the streets became more and more crowded with fresh young faces. Students of the university, drawn to Paris from all over the world by the magic of the masters, blond, brunet,

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tall, short, fat, lean, hawk-faced, round as moons—but all alike in tonsured pate and the long, black tabard that draped below their knees.

Guy was popular and well-known among them. He waved careless greetings to numerous salutations; again and again he was stopped and made to relate his exploit with the unhappy innkeeper, and the penances he was compelled to do therefor. There were murmurs of indignation.

"Five quarts of rare Burgundy!" exclaimed a dark Florentine. "Meseems Master Pierre of Normandy swells it at our expense since the nations made him rector. I mind not the Aves and the confessions; but the other touches the purse. For a lousy burgher who deserved what he got! What is Paris coming to?" And he went away shaking his head.

Cambray looked startled. "But it was murder!"

Guy began to feel he had made a mistake in taking this helpless foreigner under his protection. He was becoming boring with his queer ethical judgments and his oversensitive organs in the face of a normal Parisian street. He was about to say so when an overhanging window above them opened, a brawny housewife framed suddenly in the oblong; two bare, brawny arms heaved and a huge basin of assorted slops splashed its contents down upon their heads. Guy jumped with the agility of long experience and missed all but a few spattering drops. But poor Cambray was drenched from head to foot in foul-smelling liquor.

Mechanically, according to custom, Guy lifted his fist and yelled objurgations against the unmannerly dame; but the window had shut with a bang and his tirade was directed against a blank wall.

"Holy Mother!" he ejaculated disgustedly to the forlorn, dripping little man, "but you are an infant in the ways of cities. Don't you know better than to walk close to the wall, or not to jump wide when a window creaks overhead?"

Indistinguishable, gurgling sounds came from the victim.

"Oh, well," sighed Guy, wishing he had not been fool enough to take this strange, helpless person under his wing, "you need other clothes in any event. My fellow martinet, Jean Corbin, is about your height and build. He has a second outfit. You will pay him for it when the fees begin to come. Meanwhile, here is a tavern where you can wash the filth from you and gain a stoup of wine."

THE SWINGING sign of Le Coq et la Poule beckoned them in. On it a fierce-looking rooster spread its gilt wings and crowed over a meek little brown hen. They entered the cavernous depths. It was still morning and only a single denizen sat brooding over his leathern goblet in the farther dim corner, close to where the long spit turned over a charcoal fire and the appetizing smell of roasting fowl inundated the air.

The tavern keeper, a burly red-faced Norman, came bustling out at the sound of their footsteps on the earthen floor, his smile of oily welcome slipping onto his countenance like a mask, and rubbing his hands on his greasy apron.

"Messieurs!" he greeted, "what is your—"

He stopped short, and the smile froze to open-mouthed terror. The exploit of Guy of Salisbury had already traveled like the wind through the byways of Paris. He backed hastily toward the kitchen.

"If you reach for a cudgel," Guy

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said in a terrible voice, "I'll slit your throat from ear to ear. And if you call for aid, there are a hundred students passing in the street who seek nothing better than a fight. Serve us properly and you need fear no harm."

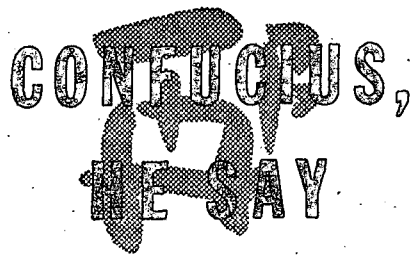
Mine host swallowed hard and came back warily. "What is your wish, Monsieur Guy?"

"First, take Master Gerald of Cambray to the well and wash him clean of the contents of a chamber pot. Then set before us a brace of fowl, done to a turn and tender to the teeth. With it a dish of little peas, firm in texture yet juicy withal, two loaves of golden-brown bread, still hot and crusty from the oven, and two beakers of Burgundian, of a rare and delicate flavor and cooled long in your cellar." Guy flexed his great arms. "And, remember, my companion, Gerald of Cambray, is a great master from the famous *Studium Generale* of Harvard across the seas. His palate is so fine he can detect even a drop of filthy water mixed into the wine."

Mine host raised his hands to call on the Virgin for testimony. "Everything shall be as you say, Monsieur Guy. May I roast in hell if the wine be not to the taste of your noble companion. Come this way, Master Gerald."

Guy sat down on a bench, grinning. Perhaps this stranger might not prove such a burden to him after all. There were possibilities. The seated man in the corner near the fire stirred, but did not turn his face out of the shadows. He toyed with his wine and seemed deep in thought. His cope was ornate in purple, trimmed with gray fur. It fell to his ankles. His long, bony head showed a ring of jet-black hair around the shaven tonsure.

In due time Cambray returned, washed, cleaned, though smelling somewhat of the odorous slops. His



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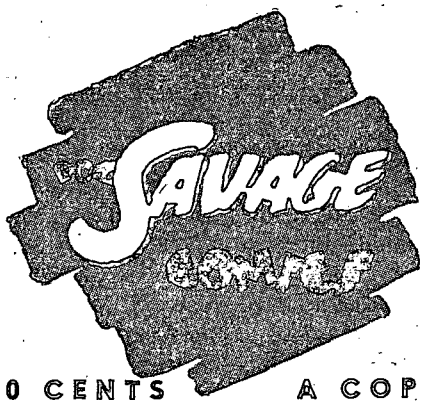

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nose was wrinkled in piteous disgust at himself. Guy chuckled and bade him to a seat on the bench. The obsequious innkeeper brought in noble flagons of wine, a steaming dish of peas, bread and two golden fowl, each on a trencher. He placed leather cups before them, and retreated hastily.

Guy stretched out his long legs in satisfaction. He poured the wine into the cups, surveying its dark-red shimmer, as it flowed, with a critical eye. "Ah, this is more like it. Nothing like a little blood-letting to bring these rascally fellows to heel. Drink to your mastership."

The little man was ravenous. It was obvious he had not eaten in some time. He downed the wine and tore into the bread. But he looked doubtful at the fowl. "Are there no knives and forks?" he said finally.

Guy took a dagger out of his belt. With one deft swoop he dismembered a leg. His fingers dipped into the peas, scooped up a round two dozen to pop into his mouth. Then, with greedy fingers, he lifted the leg, crunched on flesh and bone with sucking grunts. "Huh!" he demanded with mouth crammed full. "Have you no dagger? That is knife enough. As for *forks*, that word we know not. Is it some new-fangled weapon?"

Cambray grimaced. "I forgot where I was," he said hastily, and lifted the fowl delicately in his hand.

HUNGER was ultimately satisfied. Guy felt expansive, as he always did when a good meal was under his belt. So, evidently, did the little man. The strained look of terror seemed to have passed from his owlish eyes.

Guy sucked noisily on his teeth. "Now," he said grinning, wiping his greasy lips on his sleeve, "tell me the truth, Master Gerald. I have taken a fancy to you and it will go no further. I am discreet. That cock-and-bull story you told the rector—it was a masterpiece of invention. But to me you can speak fair. Belike you have slain a cleric in some distant land and fled here to Paris for sanctuary. If so, and you are not already excommunicated and under the ban, our English nation will save you from harm. With proper payments I can promise you absolution."

The little man started. His hand trembled violently. It seemed as if he were remembering all over again.

"I told the truth, Guy," he said hoarsely. "Would to Heaven it were all a dream. I come in fact from a land called America beyond the great sea and I was a teacher of Latin in a great university called Harvard."

Guy laughed indulgently. "I see you do not trust me. Everyone knows there are no lands across the sea, and there is no record of such a *Studium* as that you tell of."

Gerald Cambray leaned forward. Earnestness was written all over his face. "Not in this year 1263," he said, "but I came from the future—from the year 1939, to be exact. In almost seven centuries much has happened to your world. The Middle Ages were swept away, a renaissance occurred; Columbus discovered the land of America and a great nation was founded and grew to maturity. Science took mighty strides. Men fly through the air faster than birds; there are chariots that skim along the ground at tremendous speeds. It is possible to speak clearly and distinctly to one's friend though thousands of miles apart, and music is dragged out of the ether for one's entertainment." He sighed. "I wish I were back there now. All my life I had dreamed of the glories of Paris and the university in the thirteenth century, but I had never thought of

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the filth and garbage, the emptying of slops from windows, the wanton killings, the lack of forks, the eating with one's hands."

Guy was slow to anger. That had always been his boast. Whereas a hotheaded Picard might have run his host through at the first taste of watered wine, he, Guy of Salisbury, being an Englishman, had merely thrown the offending liquid into his face. Not until the fool had come for him with a cudgel had he drawn his sword. Even so it had been merely his intention to lance the villain's veins a bit. He said this to himself carefully as he hearkened, to show that he was not prone to gusts of temper. But this fellow who sat next to him was trying him sorely. Here he had practically paved the way for a true and proper confession of sin, and *this* was the answer. Not content with repeating the incredible, the fellow was actually embroidering on his tale. Did he think Guy a fool? Guy had been in Italy, had wandered through Scotland, had even journeyed to Spain to listen to a certain master at the newborn *Universitas* at Salamanca. He had seen the world; he was no peasant grubbing his ancestral acres.

"Now, look," he said with heat, toying with his dagger the while, "I am a patient man. But I do not like being mocked at. You have hearkened to the sayings of Roger Bacon, who is even now imprisoned here in Paris by order of Bonaventura for his nonsensical predictions. But do not prate such stuff to me as you would pull a cap over your eyes."

"Roger Bacon!" Awe breathed in Cambray's voice. "Of course! He was ordered into confinement in 1257. Everything checks. Believe me, Guy, I am not romancing. Everything is as I state it. Listen! I actually lived in that far future of which Bacon only caught distorted glimpses by reason of his soaring imagination. I was a peaceful professor, content to teach succeeding generations of students, to breathe the quiet air of university life. Then I took ill—the date was in October, 1939. Classes had just commenced; I was tired, exhausted. There were strange buzzings in my head. I left class hastily and went to my room. Crossing the campus things began to shimmer before my eyes. I tried to call out, to seek help. No sound came from my throat. I remember that everything seemed to spin around me. There was a roaring noise, a blast of blue flame. I fell and remembered no more."

He took a deep breath, and stared through those peculiar spectacles of his. "When I came to, I was walking unsteadily in a strange, narrow street, with strange wooden houses hemming it in. I was in a daze, not knowing what had happened; thinking perhaps it was a dream. Then Martin, the beadle, saw me and questioned me. Still dazed, I did not realize the fact he was speaking in a sort of Latin. I answered in the same tongue. The rest you know."

He paused a moment, brooding. "I don't know exactly what happened. I was not a scientist; just a teacher of languages. Perhaps Einstein might have been able to explain it. But I was carried back through time and space to this era, this incredible place." He passed his hand over his brow. It glistened with perspiration. "You *must* believe me," he cried suddenly, "or I shall go mad. I beg of you—"

THE SEATED man near the fire suddenly rose. He came toward them with measured step, his long, purple toga flapping at his heels. His head was long and narrow and his deep-

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socketed eyes burned with little black flames.

Guy sprang to his feet and bowed. "Cecco of Vercelli, the astrologic doctor," he said with a touch of fear.

Cecco nodded curtly and probed Guy's companion with keen, reflective glance. "You are that alien to whom the rectorial court has granted a license to teach astronomy?" he said abruptly.

"I am."

Guy was bewildered. "But how did you know, Master Cecco?" he cried. "We are come from thence but a few bare minutes."

The man smiled—or, rather, his face smiled. His eyes remained cold, penetrating. "Many things are known to me even before the event," he replied. He turned back to Cambray. "Do you intend to teach the higher science of astrology as well?"

"Not at all," answered the other with some heat. "That is a charlatan humbuggery, not a science. Yet if I wished, I could put all your predictions to shame with the accuracy of my own."

Guy was aghast. He was brave enough physically, and prided himself on his freedom from most vulgar superstitions. But to call astrology a charlatan science, and that in front of its most noted and dreaded expounder, the mighty Cecco, who had predicted successfully the accession of Urban IV to the papal throne, was utter sacrilege. Why, everyone knew that the stars held in their ordered wheelings the fate of all mankind—it had been proven time and time again.

Cecco's eye flashed. Yet his voice was almost caressing. "I suppose," he murmured softly, "that you, who can predict without the stars, should find it easy to place the date of your own death?"

The little man was taken aback. He lost color. "No," he faltered, "I cannot do that."

Cecco smiled. "Then listen to the stars whose messages you see fit to mock. Within a month from this very day, even to the hour, you are a dead man." He swept up his trailing toga, bowed ironically. "I wish you both good day, messieurs." Then he was gone.

The fire in the huge hearth seemed suddenly cold. Guy felt colder in the pit of his stomach. Cecco had predicted, and his predictions invariably came true.

"You see what you have done with your mockery of things sacred and your vain pretensions," he declared angrily.

The little man shrugged. That much Guy must grant him—he was brave for all his scrawny size, or a heretic at heart. He did not seem in the slightest perturbed. "Rubbish!" he retorted. "Neither your Cecco nor any living man can foretell the future."

"Yet you yourself made that claim."

"That's different. I could only predict those things of which I had knowledge that they had happened as past events when I lived in 1939. Such as, for example, that Roger Bacon would remain confined in prison until 1267 and that he would die, an embittered old man, in the year 1292."

Guy grinned. "That is an easy guess, incapable of proof for at least four years. Pray predict something that will happen within the month, as Cecco has just done."

Cambray shook his head. "I cannot," he admitted. "This year of 1263 is a blank to me. I was not sufficiently deep a medieval scholar to know what will take place."

Guy snorted, lifted the stoup of wine, replenished his beaker, and

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drained it to the bottom. "Bah!" he said. "Let us go. Furthermore, Master Gerald, let me warn you not to speak of this miraculous transposition in time if you desire to keep a whole skin. You have just made a powerful enemy in Master Cecco; you will make even more powerful enemies in the Bishop of Paris and the papal legate if you preach such heretical doctrine."

He shoved back the settle and rose. At the sound, the innkeeper came hurrying in. "Your account, Monsieur Guy. It comes to—"

Guy placed his hand significantly on his dagger. "Let us hear no more of accounts, Monsieur Toad," he retorted. "Behold before you a master of the university—one Gerald of Cambray. When his fees roll in, he will make it good with you. Farewell!"

He caught the bewildered little man by the arm, hurried him out to the accompaniment of dire threats to lay this robbery before the king himself.

Outside, Cambray said in troubled tones: "The man should have been paid. After all—"

"With what?" laughed Guy. "I have a bare dozen sous in my purse. You have none. Let him wait—or not; it does not matter. Now to gain you a school."

THE *Rue du Fouarre*—Straw Street—was the most famous street in the world. Within its tortuous, turbulent confines lay the schools of the masters of Paris—tumbledown, dilapidated, ramshackle wooden houses rented or purchased from burghers who found them no longer fit for their own living.

It had rained the night before and the thoroughfare was a bottomless quagmire of liquid mud and filth. The stench was indescribable, but Guy's well-accustomed nose found it not too oppressive. He could see, however, that his companion was blue in the face with repressed breath and the sight made him chuckle.

Horsemen dashed by with a fine disregard for pedestrians, their horses' hoofs churning up the mess and spattering it over cappas and woolen gowns alike. The street swarmed with scholars in their shaven tonsures, with citizens and citizens' wives hastening about their modest business, with peddlers crying their wares, with pimps urging the merits of certain discreet houses, with fat priests ambling by on fat mules, with dirty, half-naked urchins perpetually underfoot.

Through the doorways and out of patched, broken windows came the drone of the masters' voices, lecturing to their scholars. In some cases the drone was interrupted by whistlings and stampings and cries of derogation as exception was taken by the irreverent audience to a thesis of the master.

In the street a drunken scholar from Bourges, swarthy and staggering, collided with a tall, bony Scottish lad. The Bourgian screamed oaths and made for his dagger. "Barley-eater," he cried, "what mean you by jostling me?"

The Scotchman spat into the mud. "Cowardly, gluttonous Bourgian," he countered, and gave his opponent a shove that sent him face down into the muck.

As if by magic the swarming street coalesced. Cappas were thrown back, knives jerked out. Cudgels were seized, stone lofted out of the mire. Instantly Straw Street was filled with shouts. "Up, France! Up, England!"

A conglomerate crew of French, Burgundians, Portuguese, Italians and men of Provence rushed to the

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aid of their comrade of Bourges. An equally conglomerate crew of English, Scotch, Germans, Poles and Swedes rushed to rescue the Scotchman.

Guy grunted joyfully and pressed forward.

"Good Heaven!" Cambray cried in alarm. "Where are you going? They'll kill each other!"

"That Scot is Donald of Doon," Guy roared back over his shoulder, "a member of the English nation. We must help. Get yourself a stick, or a stone, and join. You are practically a member now."

Then Guy was in the swirl of kicking, slashing, thrusting students. Out of the houses came tumbling more lusty scholars and their masters, uttering loud cries and thirsting for the fray. His last glimpse of the man who claimed to have come from the future was of a cowering, scared figure flattened up against the side of a house, his mouth open and his eyes goggling.

Guy felt a sting across his forehead and laid open his adversary's cheek with a might counterthrust. The street was a heaving, struggling bedlam of sound.

Then someone yelled: "The provost's guard!"

FROM the end of the thoroughfare came the tramp of horses. A dozen men with the king's insignia on their hats and led by a stern, granite-faced provost sporting the fleur-de-lis, clattered down upon the screaming mob.

The provost reined in, naked sword in hand. "Messieurs, the students of Paris," he called, "stop this rioting or the king must hear of it."

An ugly roar rose in answer. The students, just now joyously engaged in slitting each other's throats, turned in unison on the guards.

Guy raised a mighty voice. "What means the Provost of Paris in invading the precincts of the university? Know you not our privileges? Get out, offal from the dung heap, before we sweep you out."

Some of the horsemen turned pale, and lifted their swords nervously in their scabbards. The provost flushed. He waved his weapon threateningly. "You go too far, students of Paris," he cried in a voice smothered with fury. "To the foul fiend with your privileges!"

"At the blasphemer!" yelled Guy and hurled forward, knife in hand. Behind him surged the throng—late combatants and mortal foes amicably side by side in a common front against the common enemy. Two of the provost's men bolted and fled, the others stood their ground.

The sword of the provost flashed down at Guy. He ducked under the belly of the rearing horse. The blow took a blond-haired Netherlander instead and cleaved him through from shaven pate to the bridge of his nose. He fell with a scream, spurting blood into the trampled mud.

Guy twisted upward with his dagger. The keen point entered the horse's belly. The horse stumbled, neighing shrilly, and precipitated its rider to the ground. Guy flung himself upon the provost as he strove to disengage his sword from the stirrup in which it had been caught. Then his foot slithered on the corpse of the Netherlander and he fell. With an oath the provost freed his sword, raised it for the murderous blow. Guy tried to rise in time, fell again. The sword swept downward. Guy shrieked: "Up, England! Help, comrades!" But the twisted street was a confusion of noise and oaths and screams and rearing horses. No one

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heard him. There was grim triumph in the provost's eye.

Someone catapulted from the wooden wall against which he had been pressed. A small, owlish figure clutching desperately in its fingers a dagger dropped by one of the combatants who would never need it any more. His hand raised simultaneously with the downsweep of the sword. It lunged forward, straight for the back of the triumphant provost.

The sword faltered in midswing. The man's eyes glazed with sudden death. He crumpled and fell in a heap, almost smothering Guy with the weight of his fall. Guy crawled painfully to his feet, wiping the mud from his brow.

"Thanks, Master Gerald!" he said warmly. "There will be no question now of your admission to our nation. You have earned your entrance."

But the little man had dropped his knife. His eyes were shuddering pools upon the blood that dyed his hand a scarlet; he looked sick and ready to vomit. "I . . . I killed a man!" he whispered. "I . . . I killed a man!"

"Don't get chicken-hearted," Guy said roughly. "You've shown yourself a man. Now don't play the woman. Come on; there is more work to do."

But the battle was already over. The guard, seeing their provost slain, and overwhelmed by numbers, fled incontinently back the way they had come, accompanied by the jeers and threats of the triumphant scholars.

In the quagmire lay half a dozen figures—the provost and one of his men, the Netherlander in the stillness of death; and three wounded scholars of the university—one of them, by his blue cloak, a master of Beauvais.

Guy leaned against the door lintel of a neighboring house, panting heavily. "Take up the wounded and carry them to the doctors of medicine," he ordered. "As for our dead comrade, Dietrich, bring him softly to the nation of the Picards, to which he belongs. There all the nations and the faculties will pass in reverence and decide what protest to make to King Louis for this foul murder."

"How about the two dead men of the guard?" Cambray asked faintly. He had already been sick. One further contribution to the general filth of the street did not matter.

"Those carrion?" Guy said in some surprise. "We leave them here for the buzzards and the pigs to finish, and as a warning to all Paris that the university knows how to defend its privileges."

"How like you this school for yourself?" demanded Guy of the new-fledged master of arts, Gerald Cambray.

The new master looked dubious. It was the morning after the notable encounter with the provost's guard. He no longer wore the outlandish, barbarous costume in which he had been found. His thin shanks were hidden under a decent cappa of sober brown, rather too large, perhaps, so that it billowed out in ludicrous fashion as he waddled gravely down the street. A linen shirt, long gray stockings, jerkin of similar hue and breeches of brown incased his limbs. Only the shoes, borrowed from Jean Corbin, flaunted a touch of scarlet and flourished upward at the toes in the Italian fashion.

A hurried evening session of the English nation to discuss the outrage had made no difficulty of admitting him to their ranks on Guy's sober affirmation that Gerald of Cambray was a master of Cam-

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bridge. "The Holy Virgin forgive me for a false oath," he grimaced aside to the still-trembling Cambray, "but in fact I stated no falsehood. You told me this Harvard of yours lies in a town called Cambridge. It is not my fault that the nation knows only of the *Studium* by that name in England."

And now they were examining the interior of a house on the very end of Straw Street, on the Left Bank, close to the *Petit-Pont*. The owner, a fat, pursy burgher, his butcher's apron bloody around his middle, rubbed his hamlike hands with eager unction.

"It is a noble room," he told them modestly. "Master Thomas Aquinas, the Dominican, but recently taught in these very quarters. If I let you have it for one livre tournois per month and thereby deprive my children of the bread they should rightly have, it is because I have taken a fancy to this new master recently arrived from England."

But Cambray only sniffed. It seemed to Guy that all this stranger did was go around holding his nose. "What is the matter?" he demanded.

The little man stared with open disgust around the large, drafty, ill-ventilated room. A single scarred and battered chair faced one end. There was no other furniture. The walls, of a muddy plaster, dripped with damp and leprous spots. The bare pine floor was strewn with rushes. On these the students were supposed to sit, cross-legged like Turks, and hearken to the pearls of wisdom dripping extempore from the master's lips. It was cold, and there was no bellied brazier for heating.

He pointed a delicate finger. "That straw!" he said in a choked way. "It smells worse than any stable. Fresh straw must be strewn."

The butcher held up his hands in horror. "The master jests," he cried. "I myself placed that good, clean straw on the floor not over three months past. Surely Master Gerald knows that it is changed but once a year, come the Feast of St. Denis."

Cambray turned pleadingly to Guy. But Guy only nodded. "Of course," he agreed, "that is the custom. There is not need to change it oftener. You had better take this school," he advised kindly. "It is a good one, and schools are now at a premium, what with the influx of Franciscans and Dominicans. Besides"—he lowered his voice—"this good burgher is the only house owner on the street silly enough to wait for his rental, instead of demanding it in advance."

The little man sighed and snuggled deeper into his voluminous brown robe. "Very well, then. But I wish I were back in the twentieth century, where things didn't smell so."

"Master Gerald!" There was reproof in Guy's voice.

"I'm sorry," he murmured apologetically. "It just slipped my tongue."

GUY OF SALISBURY swaggered into the *L'Image Notre Dame* well satisfied with himself. His association with this curious master, who pretended to have come back in time from a fabulous future, had proven so far quite lucrative. On the strength of it he had eaten and drunk on future earnings, and he still jingled the pitful few sous in his purse. Let his family back in Salisbury fume and refuse him the gold to which he was entitled—he need not forgo the fleshpots of Paris and the disputations he loved. Already he had mumbled over his few Aves penance and meekly confessed his sin to a most tolerant prelate at the Church of St.

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Guy's bellowing voice echoed down the narrow street. "Up University!" he howled, "Up University!"

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Cosme et St. Damien, where the English nation worshiped.

He was met with raucous shouts from a host of scholary revelers and youthful arts masters flushed with wine. A gray doctor of theology sat discreetly in the rear of the inn.

"Welcome, Guy," cried a dozen voices. "Come and celebrate with us the glorious victory over the provost."

He took the first tankard of wine that was thrust at him, emptied it in one huge draft. A haunch of beef turned slowly on the spit, yielding fragrant odors. Dice clinked in a leathern cup, rolled clicking and dancing along the great pine table. His fellow martinet, Jean Corbin, waved at him. "Will you have a turn with us, Guy?" he cried jovially. "If I win this throw I seek better quarters than our verminous garret. Pray for me."

The dice rolled and quivered to rest. Two solitary spots heaved into view. The gamester opposite him laughed hoarsely and raked in the pile of silver that lay between them.

Jean sighed and shook his head. "Perhaps our nest under the eaves has its points, Guy," he said. "I have no luck with wenches or dice."

Just then there was a commotion at the door. A flustered lad, not over fifteen, with his face still innocent of down, seemed to catapult through. Clutched tightly under his arm was a tattered bundle, obviously stowed with all his worldly goods; his heavy boots were plastered with the mud and dust of many roads; his round eyes were wide on the uproarious scene.

Behind him catapulted half a dozen students, whom Guy recognized as runners for various masters. "You will do well, good sir," cried one, "to attend the lectures of the illustrious Albertus of Germany. His fame spreads throughout the Universe as a clever logician. Besides," he said in half an aside, "he will willingly grant you a warm, new cloak and a yellow *biretta* when you become a bachelor."

"Bah!" sneered another. "Hearken not to that cozening wretch. Albertus knows not a major from a minor; his syllogisms are the laughingstock of Paris. Now take the noble Rinaldus, just arrived from Bologna. Now *there* is a teacher who can induct you into the mysteries of the canon law and gain you a nice, fat benefice when the time comes."

Guy forced his giant frame through the quarreling, struggling mass. He caught the bewildered youngster by the arm, pushed him by main strength into a corner. "You are a likely lad," he thundered, "and, by St. Denis, I hate to see you limned by these lying rogues. What have they to offer? Humdrum masters from Bologna and from the beer-swilling realm of Germany. Listen now to *my* offer. Master Gerald of Cambray is unique in Paris. He has studied and taught in a university rarer for its graduates than pearls from India." He brought out the syllables with bated breath. "Hast ever heard of Harvard, the great university across the seas?"

The scared little peasant shook his head in shame. "Nay, monsieur, I confess to my sorrow its name has not penetrated to my native village."

"There you are," Guy said triumphantly. "Its name is too sacred to be on every vulgar tongue. Only one master is incepted each year. Even the archbishops clamor in vain for entrance." He lowered his voice. "Furthermore, this most excellent master will teach you astronomy, the greatest of the seven arts. He will discourse for you on heavenly things

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and bring down to your earthly ears the music of the spheres. How much have you in your purse for this year's fees?"

"Four shiny livres d'or," answered the rustic mechanically.

Guy pretended surprise. "Now by all the saints!" he exclaimed. "That is in truth miraculous. Why, that is the very fee demanded by this mighty master." He shoved with his shoulder at his indignant fellow runners. "It is a bargain then." He raised his voice. "Ho, there, rascal of an innkeeper. Bring for my friend and myself two plump, tender pullets, a hunch of that noble beef on your spit, and wine to overflowing. We celebrate good master . . . uh—"

"Martin, son of Fulbert."

"The good Martin's entrance as a bejaunus of Paris." Casually, as if it were an afterthought, he added: "Place the reckoning before Martin, son of Fulbert, mine host."

THE FIRST lecture of Master Gerald of Cambray was filled to overflowing. Guy of Salisbury had seen to that. By cajoleries, by prompt seizures of newly arrived students in Paris, by wheedlings of friends, by forcible kidnaping of honest burghers who knew not a word of Latin, he had managed to create a respectable audience.

He felt quite satisfied with himself as he sat cross-legged on the straw in the very forefront of the room, right under the master's nose. The mingled odor of unwashed human bodies and damp, long-strewn straw tickled his nostrils. Precious parchment fragments lay on the auditors' laps, with quills poised above them to take down the master's words.

Gerald, seated on the only chair in the drafty room, looked half-frightened, half-sick. He had complained to Guy about the filthy rushes, had demanded chairs for his students. Guy had overruled him on both points. Item one—the expense; item two—it was against the regulations for Paris arts candidates to be seated; it would tend toward luxurious sleep.

Cambray surveyed his audience and commenced in a quavering voice that grew stronger as he gathered confidence:

"My subject," he began, "is the science of astronomy. I am going to be frank. In my land and time . . . uh . . . that is—" Guy frowned. He had warned him against any mention of that insane delusion of his about having been catapulted back from a future age. But Cambray recovered himself. "What I meant is that there are far greater masters of this science where I come from. I am familiar only with the skirts of this knowledge. Yet what I have to say will be novel to you, and will doubtless upset many of your present concepts."

Quills had started to scratch. Students were taking him down in a species of abbreviated shorthand. Jean Corbin, cross-legged next to Guy, whispered complainingly: "He speaks with a vile accent. It's hard to understand him."

"In the first place," droned Cambray, "Ptolemy's *Almagest*, which is your text, is erroneous. The Earth is not the center of the Universe. The Sun does not travel around the Earth, nor do the planets and the stars. Instead, the Earth is but one of many planets, all of which circle around the Sun as satellites."

Quills stopped sputtering. Shocked faces turned toward each other. A murmur rose like the buzzing of bees. Guy rocked on his heels. What the devil was this? He had never bothered to ask his protégé what manner of astronomy he was going to teach.

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He had assumed naturally it would be the regular, well-known facts. But this nonsense! The Earth going around the sun?

In the back of the room there was a rustle. A door banged. Someone had entered. Guy twisted his head and felt a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach. Cecco of Vercelli, the great astrologer, stood grimly against the bare plaster, his lean face more hawklike than ever, his dark eyes fixed upon the teaching master.

Guy turned again to see Cambray pause uncertainly, then take a deep breath and plunge recklessly ahead. "I hear your murmurs of doubt," he said, "and I can understand your incredulity. You have been brought up on Ptolemy's plan of the Universe as the final authority. No one has ever attempted to verify that plan for himself. You have no . . . ah . . . glasses that magnify and bring the planets closer to your vision. You haven't as yet the mathematics that would prove your errors.

"But I say to you, and in succeeding lectures I shall try to prove to the best of my limited abilities, that the Sun is a mighty ball of fire—a vast world so huge that thousands of puny planets like the Earth could fall into it and be burned to a crisp, like falling midges into a blazing furnace.

"In company with the other planets, the Earth circles the Sun. The other planets are worlds like ours; some of much greater dimensions. The so-called fixed stars are actually tremendous suns; at inconceivable distances from our own Solar System. Perhaps they, too, have planets like this Earth revolving around them."

Guy was making mechanical pigeon marks on his parchment—jagged marks that had no meaning. A horrible thought seized him by the hair. The man Gerald of Cambray was mad! He had smiled at his insistence on his travel in time as either the result of a knock on the head or a skillful attempt to achieve notoriety. But what he was now saying was sheer blasphemy. And with Cecco—

A frozen silence had fallen on the audience. Even the damp rushes no longer stirred or crackled. Then came what Guy had feared—the grim, sardonic voice of Cecco of Vercelli.

"Pray, Master Gerald," he spoke suddenly, "you have denied for us the authority of that mighty father of our science—Ptolemy. Surely, for such an unheard-of daring, you have other equally might authorities. Who are they and what are their names?"

The little man puffed up. His eyes flashed behind their peculiar glasses. The new-shaven tonsure made a bald, quivering spot in a vagrant wisp of sunshine. "Authority?" he crackled. "That is the whole trouble with this age. Instead of seeking out the truth for yourselves, you are content with what others have said before you on the subject. That is not progress, that is not the method of science. Ptolemy did the best he could with the knowledge and methods of his day. His conclusions were wholly erroneous. I could cite you authorities opposed to him, but you wouldn't know them from Adam. Because—" He stopped abruptly, and checked himself.

"You were about to go on," Cecco murmured politely. Guy did not like that smooth pur in his voice. He knew the astrologer's reputation.

"I was about to say"—Cambray recovered himself—"that I believe I can prove these seemingly astounding statements to you."

"By the proper syllogisms?"

"Syllogisms be hanged!" Cambray

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retorted vehemently. "By proper experiments. The rotation of the Earth on its axis, for example. There is a way—let me think . . . uh . . . I have it—Foucault's experiment—something to do with a swinging pendulum tracing in sand the path of the Earth as it rotates beneath it."

"This Foucault is perhaps one of the fathers of our sacred Church?" purred Cecco.

"No—that is—" Cambray looked suddenly unhappy. "It's just a name," he ended lamely. "But I could perform it for you if—"

The astrologer gathered his purple robe around him. A queer sort of grin stamped his face. "It won't be necessary," he murmured, and walked out, leaving a chill behind him.

Cambray's eyes snapped fire. He squared his shoulders. "Now, messieurs," he said calmly, as if nothing had happened, "we shall proceed."

THE FAME of his lectures grew. Nothing like them had ever been heard on Straw Street before. Students came to scoff, and remained to listen. That strange experiment, called Foucault's, had actually been performed to an excited audience. There, before their very eyes, an iron weight that tapered to a needle point, and suspended by a cord from the ceiling, made shifting turns in clean sand beneath. That was because, Cambray explained, the plane of a pendulum's vibrations always remained the same, even while the Earth was turning beneath it.

He made smoked glasses, and showed them curious spots on the face of the lordly Sun. He discoursed on the lordly stars; how they were aching billions of miles away. Stars disentangled themselves from the firmament at night, and fell to Earth. They claimed they were not stars, that they were bits of dust and lumps of iron that swam in space and were called meteors. The face of the man in the Moon—he who had blasphemed the Lord and had been transported thence for eternal punishment—Cambray maintained was actually a configuration of mountains, like the Alps that barred the way into Bologna and Padua. Worst of all, he ridiculed astrology and called it a delusion and a snare.

The sensation spread through all Paris. The halls of the other masters were deserted when Gerald of Cambray lectured. Fees poured in like a golden flood. Albertus Magnus, the Dominican, came once and took silent notes. Two doctors of theology sat frowning upon chairs, as became their dignity.

Now Guy of Salisbury was a brave lad. He would have thought nothing of flinging himself, dagger in hand, upon an armored knight armed with a sword. But this strange, intellectual audacity brought the cold sweat to his brow. It upset the ordered course of things. There was no room for God in such a frightening Universe as Cambray depicted; not only Ptolemy and Aristotle, but the sacred Bible itself was brushed aside.

Of course it wasn't true. Cambray was merely conducting a series of skillful intellectual exercises in philosophy. Syllogisms and propositions to display to the full the dazzling subtleties of argument, such as, for example, a theologic doctor had employed in the famous discussion as to how many angels could dance on the head of a pin.

Yet, as the days went on, Guy felt the uneasy sensation grow that Cambray was utterly sincere. On several occasions he tried casually to bring the errant master to an admission that it was all mere clever argument,

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but the little man looked at him with such a pained expression in his owlish eyes that he did not press the point further.

Guy's purse was filled now with his commissions on the students he had brought, but he was not happy. For one thing, he had grown fond of the strange little man; for another, things were progressing too smoothly. It was true that so far there had been no trouble. The students flocked and took diligent notes, instead of stamping and whistling derisions as they had done on occasion, even with Albertus Magnus himself when he spoke of the properties of certain plants in contradiction of what Aristotle had said concerning them.

The nations spoke privately among themselves about this heretical master, but did nothing. The Bishop of Paris had not been heard from. Nor had the papal legate, then in Paris. Even Cecco of Vercelli, whose very lucrative trade as a prognosticator had been cut into severely since the arrival of Gerald, seemingly did nothing.

It was this last which worried Guy more than anything else. Cecco was not the man to submit tamely to such a state of affairs. And, remembered Guy with a shiver, he had foretold Gerald's death within a month of that fatal day in the tavern. Only a week now remained!

The master's subversive lectures had not been interfered with because the energies of the university were just then engrossed in a mighty struggle with both king and bishop. The king, it was well known, was furiously angry at the slaying of his provost, and had refused the demand of the university that those of the guard who had escaped should be delivered to it for punishment.

The bishop, secretly envious of the tremendous power of the university, had sided with the king. Whereupon the enraged students and masters had posted the bishop all over Paris, on tavern walls and on churches, on brothels and on barber shops, as "an arid, rotten and infamous member," and that his family would be such even to the fourth generation.

Thus made a mockery, the bishop retaliated by stirring up the populace of Paris to an assault upon the proud and privilege-swollen university. The populace needed but little encouragement. The burghers of Paris hated the swaggering students and masters. They remembered insults, riots, armed invasions of homes by drunken lads, throwing of itching powders down their backs while engaged in seemly worship, and a thousand other arrogant and cruel pranks.

The narrow streets buzzed with excitement and hate. Peasants from the country round poured in, armed with clubs and staves. Cecco, though himself a master, was seen closeted with the bishop, and whispered at length to the king. When he returned to Straw Street there was a curiously contented smile on his dark countenance.

SOMEHOW the name of Gerald of Cambray began to be bandied around in the crooked byways of Paris. Whispers arose and spread like wildfire, started no one knew whence. This Cambray, who taught strange doctrines at the university, was a warlock, the devil himself come in mortal guise to wrest their souls away from the blessed Lord. He was a heretic, a follower of the damnable Averrhoes, a perverter of sacred things. He claimed, it was whispered in shuddering circles, to have come back from the future; he claimed that there was land on the

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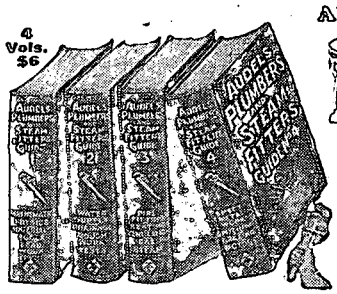

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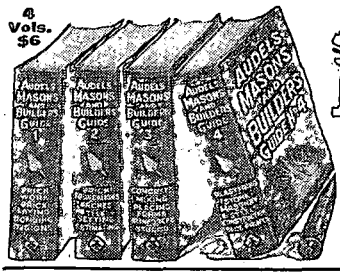

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other side of the ocean, when everyone knew only purgatory reared its mountainous height in the antipodes. Yet the university sheltered him. Destroy him and the heretic university as well, said certain men, and scattered to say it elsewhere in fresh company.

Guy caught one of these slinking emissaries at his task. He entered *La Trousse-Vache* to find a swirl of drink-flushed ragamuffins hearkening to a man he had never seen before. The man had a dark, Italianate face and was haranguing the smock-clad yokels from the top of a table.

"The good Lord is displeased with you," he thundered. "A curse is about to be visited on you and your city for harboring that vile perverter of all things holy in your midst. I speak of Master Gerald of Cambray, limb of Satan—if he be not Beelzebub himself. Destroy him, and save yourselves from destruction."

Anger surged through Guy. The whole damnable mess became suddenly clear. Cecco, the astrologer, was in back of this. He had sent out emissaries to stir up things.

The tavern subsided into deathly silence as Guy strode forward. The man saw him coming. He scrambled hastily from the table, his hand whipping inside his jerkin. "There's one of the university," he screeched. "Get him, kill him!" Then cold steel flashed in his clenched fingers.

Guy caught him a terrific clip on the side of the jaw. The man screamed once and flew in a long flat arc across the tavern to fall into a crumpled heap among a shattered glaze of earthen pots.

The young giant rubbed his skinned knuckles thoughtfully. "Anyone else wish the like?" he demanded. No one stirred; those on the outer edges began inconspicuously to fade through the doorway. The man lay just as he had fallen; moaning, mumbling through a broken jaw.

"Give me some wine, rascal!" Guy ordered the trembling innkeeper. A flagon was hastily brought him. He tossed it off and strode out, leaving a hush behind him.

On the fifth day, however, the storm broke. The university had known it was brewing, yet characteristically did nothing. Pierre of Normandy, the rector, laughed at Guy's warnings. "That canaille!" he declared contemptuously. "They know from bitter experience what would happen if they dared attack us." Then his face grew grave. "But a word with you, Guy, now that you have brought it up. I fear me that we have permitted your friend, the stranger who pretended to a license from a nonexistent *Studium*, to go too far. The papal legate has just made representations to me. He maintains that the doctrines he teaches under the guise of astronomy are false, heretical and schismatic. A report of one of his lectures, taken verbatim, has just been sent to His Holiness for investigation. He wanted me to yield him to an inquisition for trial."

The blood receded in Guy's veins. He had been expecting something like this for a week now. "What did you tell him, Pierre ?" he demanded anxiously.

The young rector drew himself up proudly. "Naturally I told him that I wouldn't think of it. Gerald of Cambray is a master of the university, a duly elected member of the English nation. As such, he is under our protection and entitled to our privileges." Then he shook his head. "However, his teachings *are* suspicious. The faculties meet the day

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after tomorrow. We shall come to a decision."

The faculties never met. For, on the following day, as night yielded to thin streaks of light in the east, the Paris populace struck.

Guy awakened to shrieks and howls and bloodthirsty cries. He bounded from his pallet of straw, shook his fellow sleepers fiercely. "Wake up," he cried. "There is a riot."

Jean Corbin yawned, rubbed his eyes, grunted: "Eh, what's that?"

Gerald of Cambray got up quietly and began to dress. He was naked as the day he was born, and his thin, shrunken body looked doubly ridiculous. Guy and Jean had found this a source of infinite, if polite, amusement. Whoever thought of stripping to the skin when one slept? In the first place it was cold; in the second, there was all that effort gone to waste. One undressed in order to dress again. It was senseless. All *they* took off at night were their shoon and tabards. But they couldn't persuade Gerald, any more than he could persuade them to shiver and splash in a basin of cold water, laboriously carried into their garret every morning.

"I said there was a riot," repeated Guy, shrugging into his tabard and buckling on his illegal sword.

Gerald carefully put on his lenses over his nearsighted eyes. "I am to blame for it," he said quietly. "I should have known better than to teach what I did in this age. Knowledge should come only when the times are ripe for it. Otherwise it is dangerous."

"Nonsense," Guy told him. "The rabble erupt like this every so often, and get their skulls bashed in as a result."

Jean fingered his knife. "There are more than the rabble this time, Guy," he said. "Hearken!"

THE STREETS echoed with running feet. Shouts mingled with the clash of arms. Horses' hoofs pounded. "The king's men-at-arms!"

"They want me," said Master Gerald tonelessly. "It is all my fault. Let them have me, Guy. Perhaps they will go away peaceably then."

"And shame the university forever?" roared the Englishman. "Never? Come on; they have fired the hall of the Picards."

Through the open window they could see the first flick of flame as it lifted from the wooden structure on the outermost verge of Straw Street, just where the Seine made its sluggish way under a wooden bridge.

Gerald caught up a stout club. They catapulted down the rickety stairs, brushed aside a frightened burgher and his wailing wife clad only in long, gray undergarments, and dashed out into the street.

They found themselves in a shambles of running men and boys—students and masters inextricably intermixed. Forbidden swords showed in abundance; knives flashed; some had pikes, some cudgels; others, finding no weapons, carried huge stones in their fists.

"Guy of Salisbury," they shouted joyfully to the blond young giant. "Lead us!"

"Up, university!" he cried, brandishing his sword. "Up, nations!"

They poured after him in a growing mob, as every house, every brothel, every tavern yielded its crew of reckless youngsters.

The noise and confusion grew ever louder as they raced toward the huge wooden barrier that blocked Straw Street from the lay world without. The flames crackled and roared from

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the hall of the Picards. Oaths and blows and the grunting of conflict mingled in fine confusion.

Guy leaped the barrier, hurled forward. Behind him came a press of determined men. They found madness ahead. The narrow street swarmed with burghers and apprentices dancing and roaring, shrieking objurgations on the hated university. Butchers, bakers, tanners, blacksmiths, armorers, linen drapers —all the guilds of Paris—armed with staves, clubs, hammers, knives; peasants from the surrounding fields with pronged pitchforks and wooden plowshares, armed retainers from the Abbey of St. Germain with iron-tipped staves, bows and arrows and clubs; and beyond, the horsemen of the king's chamberlain, helmeted and wielding great broadswords.

"Death to the clerks!" ran the cry through them all.

They were having great sport. Those unlucky university men whom they had caught unawares were running aimlessly back and forth, screaming for help, baited and torn at every step. A young lad, not more than fourteen, with tear-streaked face, was pounded down into the mud by a laughing horseman. A grave canon doctor, tragically ludicrous in skintight breeches and nothing else to cover his nakedness, thrust up his arm to avoid a storm of blows. A butcher, bloody with the night's slaughter, brought his poleax down with crushing force. The doctor's arm snapped like a reed, head and skull spread in a smear. Then he was trampled over by the howling mob.

Guy heard Gerald's sobbing intake of breath beside him. Surprised, he turned his head. "What, you here?" he cried. "Get back! They'll tear you to bits!"

The little man's teeth chattered, but his lips were drawn tight. "The . . . the beasts!" he sobbed. "The vile beasts!"

Then the rush of men behind them swept them on.

With a huge shout, "Up, university! Down, gutterers!" Guy plunged into the seething maelstrom. In an instant Straw Street was a bloody shambles.

GUY SLASHED DOWN upon the butcher. The broad red face disappeared with a howl of pain. An iron-tipped stave ripped his side; he caught the wielder a glancing thrust over the arm. The shrieks of the wounded, the groans of the dying, rose on every side. From the overhanging buildings furniture, pots, boiling water, stones dropped in fine disregard on friends and foes alike. The horsemen of the chamberlain charged, battering down their own allies in order to get at the clerics.

But the clerics were adept at this sort of street fighting. At a warning cry from Guy they flattened against the walls, dived into open doorways. As the heavy horses thundered down the crooked street, impeded by their own numbers, weapons darted out, cutting and slashing at the heaving flanks, hamstringing tendons and bringing the squealing animals to the ground. Then they darted out again, thrusting with dagger and sword at the armored men as they strove vainly to disentangle themselves from stirrups and reins.

The fight raged back and forth. Guy was arm-weary, leg-weary, sodden with blood. Yet his mighty arm rose and fell like a flail, and with a flail's terrible effect. Sometimes he caught a fleeting glimpse of the master from another time. The little man had turned into a screeching demon.

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His glasses were askew on his narrow nose, the straggly locks that rimmed his pate were wild and disheveled, and his voice rose in a thin, piping scream as he wielded his bludgeon.

But the numbers of the invaders were beginning to tell. Fighting desperately, disputing every twist and turn of the street, the university was being relentlessly forced back toward the slimy banks of the Seine. In a few minutes they'd plunge in.

Suddenly there came the sound of music. Horns and trumpets and flutes. As if by common consent all fighting ceased, and all eyes turned toward the source of the sound.

Coming from the *Clos Bruneau,* winding majestically over the bridge, moved a procession. At its head was the rector of the university, magnificent in his purple cappa and ermine. Flanking him were the doctors of theology, of canon law, of medicine, resplendent in varicolored robes, dignified in white beards and shaven tonsures. A standard-bearer carried aloft the sacred banner of St. Denis, patron saint of the university. Beside him strode others, reverently bearing jeweled caskets in which, everyone knew, reposed the relics of the saint. The papal legate, in the scarlet of a cardinal's robe, wearing his scarlet hat, walked one pace behind, and a little to one side of the rector.

And behind the faculties poured men of the university—masters and students commingled—a thousand who had not yet joined the fight. Weapons of every sort were in their hands, and faces were aflame with the desire to use them.

The rector halted the procession. The trumpets ceased. He took a casket of relics, raised it for all to see. "In the name of the university, in the name of St. Denis, in the name

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of the pope, I bid you all disperse, on penalty of excommunication and eternal damnation."

The papal legate stepped to his side. "Cease this brawling," he ordered, "and disperse to your homes. By virtue of the powers vested in me by my holy office, I hereby declare all excommunicate who obey not our commands, to be confirmed with bell, book and candle as in such cases provided."

A moan of fear went up from the multitude. Guy dropped his sword, sought to avoid scrutiny. Excommunication by bell, book and candle, and under the aegis of the relics of St. Denis, was a serious matter. It was not like lesser excommunications that a few fasts might absolve; such required a pilgrimage to Rome or to Holy Jerusalem itself to free oneself from its awful toils.

The mob began to move. At first slowly, then with a certain panic as rector and legate walked slowly forward. The peasants from the fields were the first to break. They dared not stand against the thunders of the Church. The Parisian burghers next, fearing both Church and the more material reinforcements that pressed eagerly behind the spiritual forces. The horsemen of the chamberlain last, reluctantly, savage over the maiming of their horses, the death of their comrades, but knowing that the dungeons yawned for them should the king—as very likely he would—turn upon them and disavow all knowledge of their foray.

In short order the retreat became a flying rout, with jubilant clerics yelling and jeering at the discomfited hosts. A dozen men lay dead in the trampled miré, a score more groaned and crawled with wounds. At the farther end, the hall of the Picards crashed into blazing ruin. Luckily there was no wind, and no sparks flew out to ignite the neighboring structures.

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GUY FOUND the little man leaning numbly against a wall, his head bent, his locks bloodied, red oozing through his sleeve, and puking.

"Ha! What means this?" Guy clapped him jovially on the unwounded shoulder. "You have played the man today and now you yield up your stomach?"

"I . . . I can't help it," Gerald whispered, and retched again. "All this brutality—this senseless slaughter—and I joined it, reveled in it while it lasted. I am so ashamed!"

Guy echoed, amazed. "Brutality? What would you? A craven cowardice and seeking of trembling corners? *That* were truly shameful. We have taught that scum a lesson it will take them long to get over. Now come and—"

The rector and the legate, the edges of their garments somewhat soiled by the mire, stood close to them. The rector's youthful face was grave, the legate looked angry.

"You who are called Gerald of Cambray," said the legate in a loud, censorious voice, "are now the prisoner of the Church. You will be tried before the university court tomorrow for crimes against the Spirit, for heresy and for preachments contrary to the Scriptures and the Church Fathers."

Guy stood as one stunned. Imploringly he turned to Pierre of Normandy. "Tell him, amplissime rector, that he is wrong; that you will not yield a university master to the menaces of the Church."

The rector averted his eyes. "It must be so," he said very low. "It was the bargain I struck with his eminence, the papal legate, for his aid in quelling this bloody riot. Already he has had the king's ear, and the king hastily disavows the minions of the chamberlain and promises what punishments we demand for those guilty of invading our precincts."

"But—" stammered Guy.

The little man lifted his head. His hand fell gently on Guy's arm in restraint. His face, twisted with internal retchings, grew calm and composed. "Let it be," he said in steady tones. "The rector is right. The University of Paris is too great an institution, too mighty an intellectual force for all the ages to come, to be endangered because of a single man whose tongue was always hastier than his sense.

"What I spoke was the truth; but I spoke it out of time. It had no place in the thirteenth century; fate and the logic of history are both against me. Some day, when you are all dead, the world will understand." He smiled a little. "Perhaps, who knows, my words were in part responsible; perhaps they helped bring about that later renaissance and birth of science which now lies in the future."

They took him away then.

THE DAY of the inquisition dawned cold and clear. Hoarfrost clung to the lintels as Guy and Jean Corbin went numbly toward the *Clos Bruneau*, where the court would sit. All Paris seemed bound the same way. Litters carried dainty courtiers safe over the mud. Horsemen spattered along. Prelates ambled on mules. Burghers and students, recent mortal enemies, jostled amicably in eagerness to view the fun. It was an excitement, a pageant that drew them all on.

Guy said with dreary conviction. "He will be found guilty."

"Of course," nodded Jean. "The charges against him are true. We heard him lecture ourselves."

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"Nevertheless," argued Guy, "I have a fond spot for the little man, much as one has for a helpless calf."

"So have I," Jean admitted.

Whereupon they trudged on their way in silence.

The inquisitional court was packed to the bulging doors. Guy and Jean obtained admittance only because they were prospective witnesses. The crowd clamored and buzzed and munched on apples and dried herrings it had brought along to while away the hours. A Burgundian was taking bets on the outcome, offering five to one on a conviction. A sweaty barber surgeon screwed up his eyelids speculatively. "If they hang him rather than burn him, perhaps we may be able to steal the body," he whispered to a fellow barber.

At the farther end, seated in terrible majesty on a dais, were the members of the court. The prisoner, slight and humble in appearance before the court, was the cynosure of all eyes. He stood between two beadles, his bloodied clothes washed, his wounded shoulder held in place by a skillful bandage. The tabard and borrowed shoon were gone from him; he wore instead the strange garments in which he had been found. His spectacles had been broken, and his nearsighted eyes stared at the blurred scene around him.

The rector rose and called for silence. The trial had commenced.

It went along with speed and efficiency. The beadle, Martin, was the first witness. He swore to his first meeting with Gerald Cambray near the *Pont-Neuf*, and the dazed state he seemed in. He testified to his barbarous speech—neither Latin nor French nor English—with which he answered simple questions. Then, as Martin queried further, his halting switch to a curious jargon that was nevertheless understandable as a foreign dialect of Latin.

Guy saw the prisoner straighten up at that, and his weak eyes flash. Guy remembered that Gerald had always insisted—and with heat—that *his* Latin was the pure tongue of Cicero and Virgil.

The next witness was Cecco of Vercelli. The astrologer came forward, complacently conscious of the stir and craning of necks that greeted him. He was accustomed to the awe of the multitude. He told his story with a grave, studied simplicity and transparent-seeming candor. He was, he said, an humble student of a mighty science. It was based upon the Scriptures—for did not Saul seek the future from the Witch of Endor?—upon the almagest and the Church Fathers; upon the greatest and wisest of the pagan philosophers—Hermes Trismegistus. All people of sense knew that the stars were principalities, wheeling in ordered circles according to the will of God, and holding in their revolutions the secrets of man and his destiny on Earth. The court nodded at that; a theologic doctor agreed; the rector looked doubtful; the one doctor—known for his daring—smiled a scornful little smile.

"But this stranger who called himself Gerald of Cambray," continued Cecco, "blasphemed against this holy science and against all religion. For he maintained that the stars are huge balls of fire, greater even than Earth itself; and that we are in fact an inconspicous part of an infinite Universe, rather than the hub and center of all things."

A member of the court said in a shocked voice: "If he said that, then he truly blasphemed."

"Aye, and more than that," Cecco

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cried. "He maintained that there might be people, like ourselves, or perchance greater than ourselves, on planets that circled around stars so remote from us that our puny eyes can see them not."

Laughter rose from the audience; mocking, jeering.

"Silence!" shouted the rector.

"Silence!" thundered the beadles.

Other witnesses came forward—students who had attended Gerald's lectures. They told the truth, neither more nor less. Some were obviously sympathetic, yet feared the charge of heresy against themselves if they defended the master.

The evidence piled in, grim, damning, weaving the net closer and closer. Then the beadle cried: "Guy of Salisbury, student of the university."

GUY STUMBLED on the platform. He dared not look at the prisoner.

"Did the accused ever speak to you about where he came from?" demanded the court.

Guy hesitated. He knew what a true answer to that question meant. Whatever chance for mercy, for a mild clerical punishment existed otherwise, would go by the board.

For the first time Gerald of Cambray spoke. His voice was kind, encouraging. "Tell them the truth, Guy," he exhorted. "Leave nothing out. I wish it that way."

Guy stared at him, astonished. Didn't the fool know that he was sealing his own destruction thus?

But the fool smiled. Yes, he *smiled*. "Go on, Guy," he said.

Thus defeated—for Guy had wrestled with himself during the night and determined that, oath or no oath, he would shield the little man at the trial, and afterward do abject penace for his perjury—the

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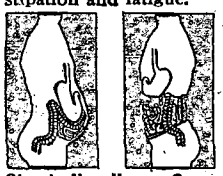

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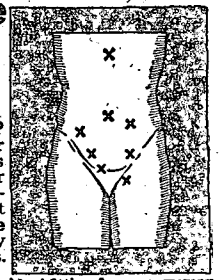

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blond Englishman unwillingly told his story.

"He told me," he said very low, "that he came from the future; from a time that will exist almost seven hundred years from now; and from a land called America that lies across the western sea. He said that man had come to great scientific achievements in that far-off day; that he could fly the air faster than any bird; that self-moving machines could carry him over the surface of the land and of the sea—yea, under the sea as well—at speeds far beyond our knowledge. He spoke of music plucked from the air; of the voice and vision of one's friend brought thousands of miles; of weapons that killed at inconceivable distances; of instruments that probed the heavens and brought to light invisible animals in a drop of water. He spoke of books reproduced in thousands of copies by a process called printing, and of lightning bolts harnessed to do man's work."

Laughter swept through the audience again like dried stubble. This time there was no attempt to halt it. Even the inquisitors wreathed their faces in contemptuous smiles.

Then one of the court grew stern. "Did you believe all this, Guy of Salisbury?" he demanded suspiciously.

"Nay," Guy replied in haste. "I am a good son of the Church; I could not believe such nonsense."

He avoided the pained and wounded look in the accused's eyes.

"Then why did you not report this blasphemous conversation, as it was your duty to do?"

"I considered it mere fanciful chatter, such as Master Bacon sometimes was wont to make."

"Master Bacon," said the court in a terrible voice, "is a sick man. Therefore the general has confined him to his cell for spiritual treatment."

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Gerald of Cambray moved quietly forward and faced inquisitors and audience. The little man seemed to grow in stature. His weak eyes blazed with a strange, inner light. In spite of themselves, a hush fell upon them all.

"You will condemn me," he said quietly. "I am well aware of that. I am not pleading for mercy. But before I go I want you to know the truth. For it is all true; what my students have testified to, what Guy of Salisbury has reluctantly disclosed; even what that charlatan Cecco has said."

The astrologer turned pale with fury, but Gerald waved him down.

"I realize it is all incredible of belief," he went on. "I, myself, in your place, would not believe it, and more than I would have in 1939 if a man appeared who claimed to have returned from the thirteenth century. I confess I still don't know what happened. My guess is that I stepped into a space-time warp, but that is sheer conjecture. You would not understand it; neither would I. I wasn't much of a scientist or mathematician in my day."

He shook his head earnestly. "I wish now I had been. Yet it wouldn't make much difference. Men's minds can accommodate only a little bit of new truth at a time. There are no short cuts. It was my fault in attempting to cram into you all my own poor store of knowledge. I should have done it item by item, and with due deference to your present ideas and traditional ways of thinking."

He faced them all with ringing challenge. "Nevertheless, in spite of what you do to me, the truth *must* march on. It will take years and centuries, but the things you call blasphemous and fantastic will one day become commonplace and ordinary. I know; I have seen them with my own eyes. I can predict them for you, step by step."

Cecco interrupted scornfully. "The man is mad. He couldn't even predict the date of his own death."

"My death," retorted Gerald, "was not sufficiently important to become a part of history."

The astrologer's smile was cruel. "Therein I am more conversant with the future, for all your pretended knowledge. I myself, one month back, foretold that you would die within a month. Tomorrow is the day."

There was a sensation. Men buzzed excitedly to one another, even the rector of the university looked impressed.

"Is that true?" he demanded of the prisoner.

Gerald said steadily: "It is true. Yet that does not make him a predicter of the future; it merely makes him a rascal and a heartless schemer. For it was due to his machinations that I was brought before you for trial today and possible execution tomorrow."

But his explanation was lost upon the crowd. The name of Cecco bandied from lip to lip, growing in awe and importance as it spread. Guy felt queer inside. It was the truth; he himself had been present when the astrologer had spoken. Always he had believed, in a careless sort of way, in the readings of the stars, but now the fact had become overwhelming. Poor Gerald was doomed; there was no help for him; the very stars had spoken; everything was over.

The inquisitors came to their verdict without leaving their seats.

"Gerald of Cambray," said the rector.

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The man who claimed to have come from the future faced him without a tremor. "I am ready," he said quietly.

"We have examined the charges, and found that you have been guilty of blasphemy, of teachings that are contrary to the tenets of the Church, of heresies too innumerable to specify in detail. We therefore decree that you be stripped of your privileges and immunities as a clericus and master of the university, and that you be handed over, a layman, to the secular arm of the king for punishment."

The prisoner braced himself. "And that punishment will be—"

"We have been merciful," responded the rector. "Instead of the usual purging by flame of your damnable errors, we have yielded you instead hanging by the neck until dead, and may God have mercy on your sinful soul."

Jean Corbin whispered eagerly to Guy. "Good old Pierre! I knew he would not permit an *auto-da-fé*."

The blond Englishman should have felt exultant, too. On all sides he heard exclamations of wonder at the surpassing clemency of the inquisitors. Yet the thought of that poor little man swinging like dried and blackened parchment from a public gibbet disturbed him. "By St. Denis," he swore unreasonably, "it is a shame!"

Jean looked surprised. "Why?" he asked. "Master Gerald was guilty, was he not?"

"I suppose so," Guy grumbled unwillingly. But a strange resentment stirred within him. He had been curiously fond of the heretic, liar and blasphemer though he had been.

THE NEXT MORNING was cloudy and sullen. Guy had not slept all night. He rose at dawn and paced the length of their garret restlessly. Jean was flinging his cappa about his shoulders. It was a bit of surreptitious finery that he wore on feast days and great occasions.

"You had better hurry, Guy," he cried, "or we'll miss the hanging."

"I am not going," growled his comrade.

Jean stared at him in amazement. "Not going? Are you mad? There is talk that it will be the most spectacular affair since the execution of that fellow who butchered seven wives in succession. The populace of all the countryside have already gathered; a holiday has been declared in town so that every apprentice and journeyman may enjoy the sight."

Guy looked at the third pallet of straw—now unoccupied—and felt choked. "I am not going," he repeated stubbornly.

Jean made an impatient gesture. "Play the fool then. *I* wouldn't miss it for worlds." He clattered down the stairs and left Guy solitary and alone.

Guy hearkened to the buzz and rising roar of the city. The gibbet stood just outside the city walls, close to the great market gate. Half a dozen dried and blackened corpses already dangled there on public view. In another few minutes another corpse would swing and jig sightlessly on the impalpable air.

In another few minutes! Guy had witnessed many a hanging, and knew exactly the procedure of it. First there was the scaffold, with its pendant noose, and the burly hangman standing with bare arms beside it. Then there was the provost's guard making a ring around the base, to prevent rescues and to keep the crowd back. The level plain would be black with people. Mothers would lift children to view the last agonies,

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stolid burghers would munch on loaves and handfuls of smoked meats to while away the time. Everyone would be dressed in gayest finery, and hawkers and peddlers would circulate nimbly, crying their wares.

Then would come the procession. A corded, black-robed confessor exhorting the condemned to the very end to repent and recant his heresies. Then Gerald of Cambray himself, clad only in his shirt, barefoot, his arms bound behind his back. The jeers and catcalls of the crowd, the straining of necks for a better view.

The slow stumbling march up to the platform of the scaffold, the loud reading of the judgment and list of his crimes, the adjustment of the noose, the quick jerk, the kicking, choking struggles in air, watched in breathless fascination by thousands of eyes; then, finally, limp, pulseless dangling.

A shiver passed through Guy. He heard the distant roar become a great shout. He clenched his palms. They were sweating. The shout had cut off abruptly. That meant—that meant—

He went over to the vacant cot, swung the straw pallet viciously across the garret. Something dropped to the pine floor with a thud. He stooped, picked it up.

GUY HAD never seen anything like it before. It was a book, yet its leaves were not of parchment, but

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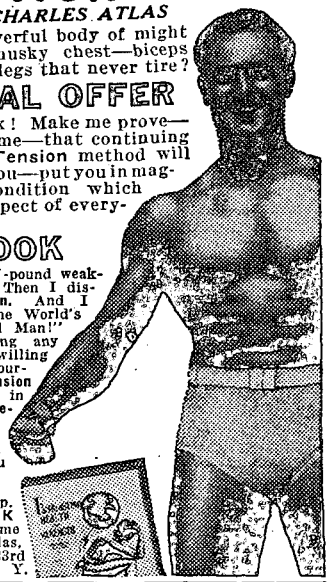

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of a flimsier texture. It was bound in stiff material that held the leaves all in place. He riffled the pages in a strange, breathless excitement.

The black letter text was remarkably even in its workmanship. No copyist could ever have achieved such regular results. The stifling sensation in his bosom increased. Could this be that fantastic printing process of which Master Gerald had spoken?

Hastily he glanced at the opening lines. They were familiar. The famous surge and pulse of Virgil. "Arma virumque cano—"

Trembling, he leafed back to the initial page. There, in that strange, blocklike black print, staring at him like letters of fire, was a strange name, and a stranger, more frightening date:

Harvard University Press,
MCMXXXVII.

Master Gerald had told the truth then! He had actually lived in that far-off time, had actually come back through time and space. Here was the evidence. A printed book, published at that Harvard University in the year 1937. Virgil in the Latin text. There were notes at the bottom of the pages, in a curious tongue that nevertheless seemed like a highly distorted English. Master Gerald must have brought it back with him in his pocket, yet he had not disclosed it. Perhaps he had felt that such black-letter magic might clinch the case against him.

Outside there was a new outcry, wilder than the first. The cold shakes got Guy. The executioner had just jerked the rope. Guy kneeled and prayed for mercy on that tortured soul. A man out of the future had just been done to death, in a time not his own, for having proclaimed that future to a people unable to understand.

THE END.

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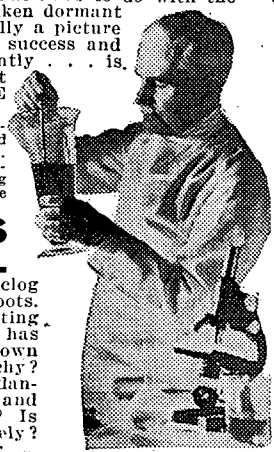
Is BALDNESS Necessary ? ? ? ?

"NO" in many cases, is the opinion of many leading scalp specialists and dermatologists. More surprising still is the ease with which aid can be obtained and baldness often can be prevented. All you have to do is practice elementary health rules which include cleanliness and exercise. Just as improper exercise will do more harm than good for other parts of your body, so will improper massage fail to sufficiently benefit hair growing on the scalp.

The Vitex Hair Institute, Inc. has now made it possible for anyone, regardless of where they live, to massage their hair and scalp in a professional manner . . . a registered physician and dermatologist has supervised the charts and written explanations; all specially created for you who want to escape baldness. These easy-to-understand charts are now ready for public distribution. These charts show you how three simple steps, that require just five minutes a day, morning and night, stimulates hair growth by inducing a freshening rush of blood to the scalp . . . this nourishes the tissues that have to do with the growth of the hair, helps to reawaken dormant but live hair roots. This is virtually a picture method which guides you to hair success and is yours to have and use permanently . . . is given to you without extra cost when you order VIDEX'S TRIPLE ACTION HAIR TREATMENT.

VIDEX TRIPLE ACTION HAIR TREATMENT includes the same products used with much success here at the Institute. The cleansing, stimulating and healthful effect of these preparations when used along with the scalp manipulations effect the greatest benefits.



STOP BALDNESS At Danger Areas . . . .

Remove foreign substances that clog the pores and choke the hair roots. When there is no crusty, scaly coating to interfere with circulation, hair has a chance to grow. Check up your own hair condition. Is your scalp itchy? Are you troubled with excessive dandruff? Is your hair dull, lifeless and brittle? Is your hair getting thin? Is your hair coming out excessively? These are generally healthy hair trouble makers. Use VIDEX'S Hair Treatment to help create and maintain a healthy scalp condition that will encourage healthy hair growth.

THERE IS HOPE FOR YOU

Don't despair because of excessive loss of hair . . . don't resign yourself to baldness, because there is hope for you. If your condition is caused by excessive dandruff or some other local disorder, VIDEX Treatment will pave the way to keep your hair growing. Hundreds of unsolicited and enthusiastic letters received from users proves that VIDEX is good . . . order today and start to correct your hair troubles right away.

VIDEX'S Treatment Helps Three Important Benefits

1. Stimulates growth areas: After applying VIDEX you will note a pleasant tingling or "drawing" sensation. Evidence of how effectively your scalp is being stimulated in the areas where blood must nourish the hair roots.

2. Helps dispel excessive dandruff, stops itching. Effective in dissolving accumulated waste matter that strangles the hair and causes irritation by clogging up the follicle "funnels."

3. Purifies as it cleanses. After you have allowed VIDEX to "work" it saponifies easily with water and rinses completely clear, leaving the scalp healthfully clean and the hair naturally brilliant.

JUST 10 MINUTES A DAY TO HELP KEEP BALDNESS AWAY

Order today and we will include without extra cost the VITEX HAIR INSTITUTE, Inc. "Three Easy Steps." This method, instructions and advice alone is invaluable. Shows you our expert, correct way to manipulate areas that effect hair growing centers. Written and pictured in easy-to-understand, simplified form so that you can practice the system in privacy, in spare time.

RUSH COUPON FOR SPECIAL OFFER

Order now and get without extra cost our valuable, profusely illustrated, booklet explaining THE VITEX SYSTEM. . . . "Our simplified method for scientific hair improvement at home." It explains . . . Your Head and Its Hair . . . What Can Be Done? . . . How Does Hair Grow? . . . The Sebaceous Glands . . . Why Hair Falls and contains other valuable advice. Send today for an eight treatment bottle of VIDEX'S Triple Action Treatment for only $1.00 . . . Save money . . . order this special $3 combination. A 16 oz. size of VIDEX'S Triple Action Treatment (4 times quantity) is regularly $3. Order this and we include a one dollar 1 oz. size of VIDEX'S CORRECTIVE POMADE, saving you $2. You really should have Pomade because it is used daily and helps speed up results. RUSH COUPON TODAY!

● MONEY BACK GUARANTEE ●

You do not risk a cent using VIDEX. You must be satisfied or your money will be refunded in full after ten days trial. Order TODAY . . . it does so much and costs so little.

● IMPORTANT NOTICE ●

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VITEX HAIR INSTITUTE, Inc.
Dept. 605
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☐ Send me instructions, charts and other information showing me how to lift my scalp. Also send $1.00 8-treatment size of **Videx Hair and Scalp Triple Action Treatment** postpaid.

☐ I enclose $3. Send large economy size of VIDEX postpaid and include **FREE** 1 oz. jar of daily **Corrective Pomade.** Also include the special instructions and scalp lifting charts.

☐ Ship order checked above C.O.D. I will pay postage.

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NOTE: Canadian and foreign orders must be accompanied by cash.

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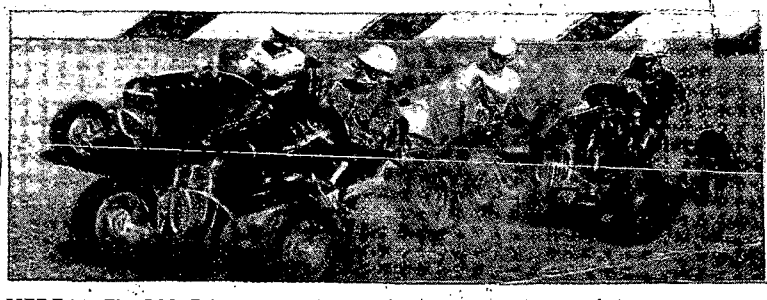
Bob Swanson

picks his racing cars for speed—his cigarettes for slow burning



HERE THEY COME in a hurricane of dirt and oil. You can almost hear the whine of motors and shriek of brakes as they streak into the sharp unbanked curves. They may call 'em "*midget* racers," but there's *speed to burn* underneath those hoods. Leading the pack in the picture above is Bob Swanson, Pacific Coast champ. In a split second these racers may be somersaulting, flying through fences. Bob Swanson likes a slower pace in his off-time. Smokes Camels a lot. He explains: "I don't like overheating in my cigarette any more than in a racing motor. I stick to Camels. I know they're slower-burning . . . milder and cooler."

Slower-burning Camels give the extras

EXTRA MILDNESS

EXTRA COOLNESS

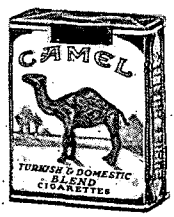
EXTRA FLAVOR

EXTRA SMOKING

SPEED'S MY DISH IN A RACING CAR—BUT I WANT MY CIGARETTE **SLOW-BURNING.** . CAMEL CIGARETTES BURN ON THE SLOW SIDE— GIVE THE 'EXTRAS' IN SMOKING PLEASURE

WITH BOB SWANSON, it's always a slow-burning Camel. "That slower burning makes a big difference," says Bob. "Camels are milder — easier on my throat. They don't bother my nerves. They never tire my taste. And they give an extra amount of smoking, too." Millions have learned that in cigarettes the coveted extras of coolness, mildness (which includes freedom from irritation), and full, rich flavor go with *slow-burning* Camels.

In recent laboratory tests, CAMELS burned 25% *slower* than the average of the 15 other of the largest-selling brands tested—slower than *any* of them. That means, on the average, a smoking *plus* equal to



5 EXTRA SMOKES PER PACK!

MORE PLEASURE PER PUFF ... MORE PUFFS PER PACK!

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Camels — *the cigarette of Costlier Tobaccos*

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